

HUMAN DEVELOPMENT

The Jesuit Educational
Center for Human Development

God's Constricted Ones

Group Ministry to Broken Priests

An Integrative Model of Counseling

The Women's Ordination Question

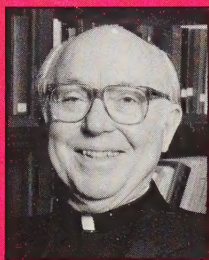
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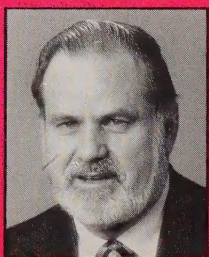
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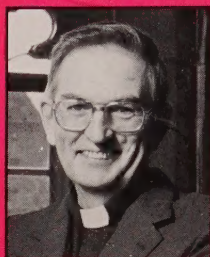
EDITOR-IN-CHIEF James J. Gill, S.J., M.D., a priest and psychiatrist, is the founder of the journal *HUMAN DEVELOPMENT* and also the founder and director of the Christian Institute for the Study of Human Sexuality. He serves as a psychiatric consultant to the Institute of Living in Hartford, Connecticut, and to the U.S. Bishops' Ad Hoc Committee on Sexual Abuse.



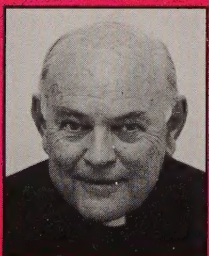
EXECUTIVE EDITOR Linda Amadeo, R.N., M.S., a nurse whose clinical specialty is psychiatry, is a consultant to the Christian Institute for the Study of Human Sexuality at the Catholic Theological Union in Chicago, Illinois. She conducts workshops internationally on topics related to human development and women's issues.



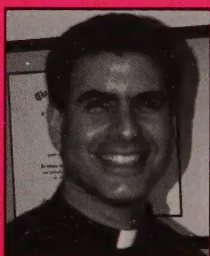
SENIOR EDITOR Loughlan Soffield, S.T., M.A., has conducted workshops on psychology and ministry in North and South America, Europe, Australia, Africa, Asia, and India.



SENIOR EDITOR William A. Barry, S.J., Ph.D., a priest, author, spiritual director, and lecturer, is codirector of the Jesuit tertianship program in the New England Province of the Society of Jesus. He lives at Campion Center in Weston, Massachusetts.



BOOK REVIEW EDITOR Jon J. O'Brien, S.J., D.O., is a priest, lawyer, and physician, board-certified in psychiatry. He is on the formation faculty at Theological College and clinical associate professor of psychiatry at Georgetown University Medical Center, Washington, D.C.



ASSOCIATE EDITOR John J. Cecero, S.J., Ph.D., a priest and clinical psychologist, is assistant professor in the Department of Psychology at Fordham University. In addition to teaching and conducting research, he is involved in the practice of psychotherapy at the Cognitive Therapy Center of New York.

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Authors are responsible for the completeness and accuracy of proper names in both text and bibliography. Acknowledgments must be given when substantial material is quoted from other publications. Provide author name(s), title of article, title of journal or book, volume number, page(s), month and year, and publisher's permission to use material.

Letters are welcome and will be published as space permits and at the discretion of the editors. Such communications should not exceed 600 words and are subject to editing.

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Unaccepted mailed manuscripts will not be returned unless requested and submitted with a stamped, self-addressed return envelope.

Editorial Office: HUMAN DEVELOPMENT, 5401 South Cornell Avenue, Chicago, IL 60615-5698; phone: (773) 684-8146; fax: (773) 684-8154; e-mail: jesedcntr@aol.com

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EDITOR'S PAGE

HEARTPRINTS LEFT UPON OUR LIVES

Since our very first issue in 1980, our list of editorial board members (appearing on the opposite page) has included the name of Meyer Friedman, M.D., world-renowned cardiologist, constant supporter of our journalistic and educational ministry, and beloved friend. We lost him to Heaven since the last time we went to press, and the world and our own lives are poorer for his passing. Along with thousands of his patients, professional colleagues, participants in his research projects, and fortunate friends, we struggle these days to find suitable ways to pay tribute to this extraordinary man, whose relentless and fruitful striving to understand the mind-body relationship has changed the way millions of people live around the world.

"Mike" Friedman, as his friends call him, progressed from performing groundbreaking research on such medical phenomena as gout, hypertension, and cholesterol production to discovering the physiologic mechanism by which coronary arteries become damaged and heart attacks and subsequent death occur. His most widely known research—deserving Nobel Prize consideration—resulted in his discovery of the role human emotions play in the development of heart disease, especially in individuals who manifest what Mike identified and named as the "Type-A behavior pattern." His pioneering design of a comprehensive treatment program capable of preventing the advance of coronary heart disease, and perhaps even its onset, in Type-A individuals has been reported in prestigious medical and psychological journals worldwide. In a *New York Times* obituary, Valentin Fuster, M.D., past president of the American Heart

Association, was quoted as saying that Mike and his collaborator, Ray Rosenman, M.D., "will be recognized as figures of major importance in the history of research into cardiovascular disease."

But Mike will be remembered for much more than his famous discovery that persons who live feeling chronically hurried, with too-frequent bursts of impatience and hostility punctuating their everyday activities, are the ones most likely to suffer heart attacks. He was also a man whom many of his professional associates and patients described at last week's memorial service as filled with love—for medicine; for tireless work; for his family, friends, colleagues, and patients; for painstaking and original research; for literature, theater, music, and travel; for his home, garden, and pets. Mike loved life. He loved it and lived it in a way that taught those of us who knew him to think about how we live our own lives and inspired us to strive to make the most of every God-given moment, just as he did.

Mike's loves were transparent. They were vibrant, strong, and constant—just what we might expect in someone whose extraordinary career of service to humanity was dedicated to keeping our physical hearts healthy for the sake of a long and happy experience of the gift of life.

A year ago, in July, many of his friends and colleagues celebrated with him Mike's 90th birthday. We gave him gifts and greeting cards, of course, and arranged in his honor several special dinners at his favorite San Francisco restaurants. He gave every sign of enjoying those evenings immensely, and he confirmed that in a letter I received from him just a few weeks later. Demonstrating his priceless sense of humor, Mike wrote: "I had a wonderful time, Jim, and I'm grateful for all that all of you did to make it a joyful 90th birthday for me. Still, I can't help but say

to myself, with all the physical discomfort I so often feel these days, 'What I wouldn't give just to be 80 again!'"

A line from a Broadway play I saw many years ago is a treasure I've never forgotten. To paraphrase what the actor said: "If you really love someone, you never look at the world and what's in it without seeing it all through that person's eyes." By that standard, I'm certain that, like so many others who have been privileged to share his life with him, I have really loved Mike. Year after year this past quarter century, I have found myself thinking about the world of people, places, and events that made up his fascinating lifetime, and I couldn't help but view them through his eyes and cherish them in the same way he did.

Some people enter a room and later exit, leaving their fingerprints behind. Others leave footprints on the paths they have walked upon. In recent years voiceprints have been used to identify individuals, and those traces of their unique voices have been used to open locked doors, file cabinets, or vaults housing highly valued objects. But the prints I have

come to recognize as those Mike has impressed upon my own and countless others' consciousness are lasting images of the radiant enthusiasms that filled and perennially expressed his life-loving heart. I'd call them the heartprints Mike has left, stamped upon and permanently influencing our lives.

Meyer Friedman, the physician, was a specialist of the heart—a man who knew how to love, and one whose life has generated in the hearts of many a reflection of the zest, kindness, and sense of purpose that characterized his own. I pray that the lives of all of us who have loved Mike will reveal the immense gratitude we feel toward him, and add a little to the happiness we ask God to grant forever to Mike's sweet soul.



James J. Gill, S.J., M.D.
Editor-in-Chief

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* * *

For more information, please see the back cover of this issue

God's Constricted Ones

Suzanne Mayer, I.H.M., Ph.D.

The other day I attended the funeral of an elderly sister with whom I had worked as a "partner" many years ago. As teachers, she and I had shared the same elementary grade, but with different groups of children. The priest who celebrated her liturgy had been taught by Sister long before I had known her or worked with her—in fact, before I had entered religious life. In the homily, this priest described a woman I had never known. He spoke of her with warm and ringing praise, telling of her compassion and kindness, her willingness to work tirelessly with the most struggling student. He called hers "the face of Christ" that appeared before him and his sixth-grade confreres each day.

When I taught with Sister, she seemed an angry and impatient person—one for whom the classroom was more an arduous duty than a source of joy, and the children merely inconveniences to be dealt with each day. Her face more often wore a scowl than a smile. Her words were critical, her punishments heavy-handed.

As I listened to the final words of blessing, calling on all angels and saints "to meet her on the way," I puzzled over what had happened to that once-loving, Christ-filled face. That face had welcomed children so well that fifty years later they would hold her memory with honor. What could have so altered her life,

dedicated to God in and through the ministry of her apostolate? My sadness at the discrepancy between the woman of the past and the woman of my recollection triggered other associations.

The first was the memory of a priest in whose parish I lived while in a student residency program. Occasionally, he would come to celebrate Eucharist with the sisters in the residence. Throughout the liturgy, his eyes remained lowered; his movements were slow and dragging, his face immobile. He spoke little to us, never offering the sign of peace or accepting it from anyone in the congregation. After mass he departed immediately, a shadow running down the hallway. The other priests in the parish where he ministered had a habit of standing outside the church doors on Sunday mornings, greeting the parishioners as they exited. He stood also, alone and distant, shaking the hands of those few who came over to him, again looking neither right nor left but steadfastly at the ground.

Right before I was scheduled to leave the residency, this priest had a stroke and died suddenly. I stayed for his funeral mass, held at his request in that parish church rather than at the provincial house of his community. A much younger priest of his order came for liturgy as chief celebrant and homilist. He shared his experience of Father, telling of his humor and

wisdom, of his generosity to him when he was just starting out. "He believed in me more often than I believed in myself and taught me to have real self-worth," was this priest's epitaph. He told stories of the two of them in the mission field: he, young and zealous, and this older priest, his mentor, even more dedicated, on fire for the work of God and service of the people. He recalled that one time, when guerrillas threatened the poor citizens of the village in which they served, this priest stood with his arms across the thin planks of the church doors. Inside, his parishioners huddled; outside, this single man challenged those with guns and machetes to deal with him first. I sat amazed. What had happened to so change that ardent missionary? What had erased, in his latter years, not only the spark of fire but also the desire for personal connections?

One clue lies in the story of a sister—a teacher from another congregation—who had a very difficult time with the high-school students, faculty, and administration in the single year during which I worked with her. Some days I would find her in tears in the faculty room. Other days I would hear stories of her students—teenagers who most found cooperative and interested—acting out to the point of walking out of class or throwing books. Neither I nor the others on that staff got to know her much beyond the chaos of her disastrous academic situation.

About ten years after our year together, I traveled to the motherhouse of this sister to present a week-end workshop. At some point, the sister who had made the arrangements for my visit suggested that we go to the administration wing to meet the sisters on the council. Imagine my surprise when the assistant to their president turned out to be the sister of the disastrous high school memory.

She invited me to share lunch with her, and in the course of conversation said that whenever she would run into anyone associated with that year, she would cringe inside. "In some ways," she stated, "that time is a blank state for me. The people from that year are names and blurry faces, the events all smeared with the one brush of shame, pain, and guilt. That was a terrible time for me." She continued relating the enormous stressors that had consumed her during that period: a sudden change from a place she had loved and in which she had felt comfortable and accepted; a dying mother whose illness had transformed her from the loving, gentle person sister knew to someone constantly demanding; a switch in subjects to an area in which she felt insecure; and a local convent situation marked by little support from other members. "If anyone here who knew me before that tragic interlude or has come to know me since, ever encountered

me during that year, they would not even have recognized me."

CAUGHT IN BAD MOMENTS

The transformation I saw in the woman who sat so graciously with me at lunch, worked so competently in her office of leadership, and dealt so warmly and genuinely with her sisters in community lifted my heart. But more, in light of the sad epilogues to my other two memories, it gave me some insight. What had happened to all three of these persons? What had made the difference with the sister of the last recollection? My sense was that I had, in a metaphoric way, caught each of them in a "bad moment." For the elderly sister, that moment encompassed the final days of her active apostolate. For the priest, that moment covered all the time that I and those in his parish knew him. For the high-school-teacher sister, it was that single year. Why so long and enduring for the first two and so condensed for the last? I felt that if I could answer that, I would have a clue to what at times goes wrong and twists personalities into distorted images of their true selves. As a psychologist, of course, my next logical step is to believe that what can be predicted can be changed and even prevented.

I began with words. What words traced in these persons the common thread that wove their lives, so different and unique, in a unifying pattern? A brainstorm of descriptives erupted within me—unconnected, unfeeling, dislocated, disordered, alienated, hurting, hurtful, distanced, and distancing. But one key word seemed to encapsulate them all, a word I had discovered in a newfound book: *constricted*. Drawn from literature on abuse and post-traumatic stress, the word's description seemed to lend itself to these members of religious life, who had shut down or perhaps shut themselves within walls of pain. In *Trauma and Recovery*, describing the "aftermath of violence" and those who survive it, Judith Lewis Herman speaks of "constrictive symptoms." Drawing on the emotional states of those who outlive abuse, she notes that many survivors, rather than experiencing a complete amnesia of memory and feelings, react with "the formation of a truncated memory, devoid of emotion and meaning"—a reaction that applies "not only to the thought, memory, and states of consciousness but also to the entire field of purposeful action and initiative. In an attempt to create some sense of safety and to control their pervasive fear, traumatized people restrict their lives." The three individuals described all fit that final phrase with such reality: they had for some reasons constricted their past and so restricted their presents and futures.

What do these constricted persons look like? They appear “numb” in many respects, warding off the pain or pressure that weighs upon them with whatever sedation seems to work—be it intoxicants, workaholism, dissociation, denial, or deadening the senses. Emily Dickinson, in one of her most powerful poems, writes: “After great pain a formal feeling comes—/The nerves sit ceremonious like tombs . . . /The feet mechanical go round/A wooden way/Of ground or air of Ought.” This “formal feeling,” this numbness, is a normal enough reaction to the crisis moment of loss or pain or being overwhelmed. The operative phrase here is “to the crisis moment.” What many counselors encounter in working with those who have survived devastation—external or internal—is what Herman calls the “psychic numbness” or “paralysis of mind” that extends well beyond the critical period and becomes a dysfunctional mode of defense.

Dickinson, in the last verse of that same poem, calls the crisis moment “the hour of lead” but warns: “Remembered if outlived/As freezing persons recollect/ The snow—/ First chill, then stupor, then / The letting go.” The letting go of the paralyzed survivor of trauma is not that of Kubler-Ross’s acceptance stage or Christian spirituality’s surrendering to God. Rather, it is the giving up of a Jack London hiker who, having run out of food and fire, sits down to the frozen sleep that leads to death.

DEPRESSION BECOMES CHRONIC

This same psychic phenomenon is explored through a different theoretical perspective in Martin Seligman’s work on “learned helplessness.” Through experimental studies done under his direction since the late 1970s, a body of work has emerged that describes individuals who, because of critical experiences of powerlessness in the face of threat, pain, fear, or loss, “learn” to lie down and die. As Seligman reports in *Human Helplessness: Theory and Applications*, it is ultimately not the severity of the traumatic event or the uncontrollability within the situation that is so paralyzing. Rather, “passivity, depression, and performance decrements” are the results of how an individual views an event. The anxiety, frustration, and depression that are natural outcomes of crisis can often trigger to positive psychological growth—but in certain persons they can be predictive of defeat and victimization. These individuals enter into “the hour of lead” and never exit. They move from the initial stupor into chronic depression. This depressive state becomes so pervasive that the walls that have gone up for protection become the blocks to any hope or vision for the future. Even when a door opens before such individuals, indicating a way out of

the darkness and pain, they lie huddled in their personal prison, unable to step out into the light.

An interesting commonality between these two different theoretical perspectives on the traumatized individual centers on the role of community—both as the target for the sense of betrayal and broken trust and as the necessary forum for healing. As Herman observes,

Traumatized people suffer damage to the basic structures of the self. They lose their trust in themselves, in other people, and in God. Their self-esteem is assaulted by experiences of humiliation, guilt, and helplessness. Their capacity for intimacy is compromised by intense and contradictory feelings of need and fear. The identity they had formed prior to the trauma is irrevocably destroyed.

She goes on to explain that these intense feelings center around a sense of betrayal and abandonment. Often, either because of actual breaches of trust by those in important relationships to the survivor or perceived damage of this kind, the person suffers intense feelings of loss, akin to pathological grief. Frequently, the individual, needing to project these emotions onto to some external, seizes on that which is closest: a beloved friend, spouse, or once-supportive community.

As the community is often seen as the doer of destruction, both trauma theorists, as well as those of the Seligman school, emphasize the need for community in healing. While “the former identity may be irrevocably [lost],” a path to a recovered self is possible. This path needs to find its way into meaning—a remaking of meaning that includes the devastating history but is not distorted because of it.

COMMUNITY CAN HEAL

Howard Stone, in his book *Crisis Counseling*, sees a Christian community as a natural site for meeting such needs—an expression of Pauline *koinonia*. One dimension of this, Christian partnership, presents enormous restorative functions, for “out of it trust develops. . . people reach out to each other in their crises as well as in their day to day troubles, despair, hope and joy.”

Herman likens persons with the potential to move out of crisis mode as “refugees entering a new country.” Just as the old self has been shattered, so has the old world of trust and values, relationships and commonality been rent asunder. To forge a new self—a self of meaning—these persons need a safe place, some holy ground in which such creation can take shape. In this place they reach out to find connection, community.

As for the three religious described in this article, two of them somehow never found their holy ground. Perhaps, as Seligman notes in multiple experimental results, the space existed, but they had lost the vision to see it lying right before them. Maybe people did reach out to sister in her classroom, to father as he waited outside the church, but they could not hear the compassion in the words or feel the warmth in the handshake that might have prompted a stirring of hope. Or perhaps the community for healing lay too far outside the limits of their world for them to reach.

For the second sister, healing happened. She herself testified to me over lunch that it was the caring, loving concern of sisters who reached out to her after her mother's death, and the supportive network of relationships she found available then, that drew her out of her cold shell and into the warmth.

As I reflected on the answers to my questions about what had happened, why so enduring a change, and what had made the difference, a biblical image came to mind. It comes from chapter 2 of Genesis, the second account of creation. In this narration, the Yahwehistic author (I call him the poet of the Decalogue) spins a vision of creation as it existed in its primal chaos: "When the Lord God (Yahweh) made the universe, there were no plants on the earth and no seeds had sprouted, because he had not sent any rain, and there was no one to cultivate the land. But water would come up from beneath the surface" (Gen. 2:5-6). Water exists, but not for growth. Darkness, disharmony, and disorder proliferate. Life does not stir. Neither does hope or promise or balance or goodness or peace. The world of Genesis 2 parallels the internal and external world of a person devastated by pain and loss. Then, at the height of chaos, God breathes forth "life-giving breath" (2:7). God breathes forth Ruah, the creating, wholing, healing spirit of life. Then green, fecundity, richness, ripeness, warmth and growth abound. "And a garden came to be in the East . . . where all kinds of beautiful trees

grow and produce good fruit" (2: 8-9). Ruah, the life-giving, generative spirit of God, moved across the turbulence and devastation and brought order, harmony, and above all community, for into this richness the human family is created.

For my elderly sister and the one-time missionary priest, no Ruah moved within them. Perhaps there was no room. Perhaps Ruah moved, but they could not invite so disturbing a guest. But as someone who knows the graced healing that can come from supportive community; as one who has seen it within both rehab centers and local community rooms, as well as in college dorms and family living rooms; as a person who has heard the testimony of others who have said, "I couldn't have done it without my family, my sisters, my brother priests, my friends"; I see Ruah moving out of us now to inspire and inspire. We are the makers of *koinonia*. We are the forgers of community. We are the creative breath that can, when we catch someone in a "bad moment," become a transformative presence.

RECOMMENDED READING

- Herman, J. *Trauma and Recovery*. New York, New York: Basic Books, 1997.
- Seligman, M., and J. Garber (eds). *Human Helplessness: Theory and Applications*. New York, New York: Academic Press, 1980.
- Stone, H. *Crisis Counseling*. Minneapolis, Minnesota: Augsburg Fortress, 1993.



Sister Suzanne Mayer, I.H.M., Ph.D., a pastoral counselor, directs the Immaculate Heart of Mary Spirituality Center at Villa Maria House of Studies in Immaculata, Pennsylvania. She is an adjunct faculty member at Newman College, Immaculata College, and Saint Charles Borromeo Seminary.

Group Ministry to Broken Priests

Gerald D. Coleman, S.S., and Christopher J. Sellars

The codirector of Family Life Ministries in the Archdiocese of San Francisco, Ed Gleason, published a provocative article in *America* magazine (10 October 1992) entitled "Recovery for Troubled Marriages." The article highly recommends *Retrouvaille* (a French word meaning "rediscovery"), a ministry led by married couples who are recovering from their own troubled relationships. The major characteristics of this ministry are listening to self-disclosure stories, recognizing the need for honesty with oneself, making a personal inventory, putting one's trust in God, acknowledging that personal selfishness is a root cause of one's problems, taking spiritual steps, granting forgiveness, aiming to change oneself, ridding oneself of resentment, and participating in a ministry of helping others.

In *Retrouvaille*, humility is a core value for oneself and a gift to others who sit and listen. Couples gradually realize that they are not alone in their struggles and that their problems are not unique. They are enabled to identify with the weaknesses and mistakes of others, and this "connection" gives them the courage, insight, and grace to talk openly about their own problems. Such a ministry can go a long way in ending the secrets and lack of accountability that plague troubled marriages.

Father Ronald Rolheiser has also written about the transforming nature of the characteristics embedded in *Retrouvaille*. All of us, he writes, are in

need of "pruning our arrogance"; we need to allow our negative energy to be absorbed in Christian understanding. "We see this in Jesus," he writes in a *Los Angeles Tidings* article (2 February 2001). "He never played the victim and he refused utterly to create victims. He never gave back in kind, but took in the hurt of those around him, absorbed it, and transformed it."

BROKEN GLASS

John Paul II's 1992 apostolic exhortation *Pastores Dabo Vobis* outlines the level of spirituality that should touch the heart and behavior of every priest. "Even in the midst of human weakness," the Pope writes, a priest must still seek for perfection. In pursuing this perfection, the priest must realize the "intimate bond . . . between [his] spiritual life and the exercise of his ministry: By their everyday sacred actions, as by the entire ministry which they exercise in union with the bishop and their fellow priests, they are being directed toward perfection in life. Priestly holiness itself contributes very greatly to a fruitful fulfillment of the priestly ministry."

This exhortation delineates the kind of spirituality a priest should sustain and pursue—a holiness of life that bridges his sacramental ministry, his priestly responsibilities, and his awareness of human limitations. But what if this bridge weakens or breaks?

Writing in *America* (9 September 1995), therapists Paula A. Holmes and Mary Jo Meehan make reference to the 1993 homily of Cardinal John J. O'Connor at the Chrism Mass in Saint Patrick's Cathedral. The homily began with a story about Cardinal Angelo Roncalli, who later became Pope John XXIII.

At dinner one evening, the story goes, Roncalli's priest-secretary spoke to him about a priest who was the source of much scandal in the community. The enthusiastic young secretary was questioning the Cardinal's willingness to tolerate this man's behavior. After remaining silent for some time and gazing at the wine goblet in his hand, the Cardinal asked his young secretary, "Whose glass is this?"

Taken aback by the question, the priest responded, "Why, it is yours, Your Eminence."

Without another word, Roncalli threw it to the floor, where it shattered into a thousand pieces. He then asked, "And whose glass is it now, Father?"

The young priest was quiet for a moment and then replied, "It is yours, Your Eminence."

The Cardinal looked into the young man's eyes and asked one final question: "Is the priest you asked me about any less my brother because he is shattered and broken, than this goblet is still mine despite its brokenness?"

The same point is captured in a Hasidic tale: One day a disciple, in a burst of feeling, exclaimed to the rabbi, "My master, I love you!"

The rabbi looked up from his books and asked, "Do you know what hurts me, my son?"

The disciple was puzzled: "Why do you confuse me with your irrelevant question?"

The rabbi replied, "If you do not know what hurts me, how can you truly love me?"

Graham Greene perceptively remarked, in *The Heart of the Matter*, "The Church knows all the rules, but it doesn't know what goes on in a single heart."

At some level, all priests are broken, hurting, and alone. It is part of the human condition. When a priest's spirituality weakens, he becomes fragile, ripe for a host of personal difficulties. If his life and ministry are shattered, he is still a priest, but he is a hurting priest who needs rediscovery of his wholeness and holiness. He is in need of strong support to keep his fragile priesthood from breaking. When a priest's life and ministry are shattered, all priests in a sense share in this brokenness. For this reason especially, a fragile priest needs to rediscover his wholeness and holiness by listening to and learning from other priests.

Priest-psychologist Stephen J. Rossetti, in addressing the question of "Priest Suicides and the Crisis of Faith" (*America*, 29 October 1994), comments that "it is difficult to remain in this world as a 'living disgrace.'" We are painfully aware of the many examples

of clergy misconduct that have cast a shadow over the priesthood. Reflecting on this "changing face of the priesthood" led one national Catholic newspaper to conclude, "Add to all that trauma/abuse the increasing revelations of death by AIDS, in many instances as the result of homosexual activity by men presumed to be celibate, and the impression emerges of an institution besieged, uncertain of its identity or its standing in the community." Joseph Gallagher's remark in *The Pain and the Privilege* focuses the problem: "Now that I am a priest I have a boundless capacity for thwarting good and for turning wine into water."

REDISCOVERY AND HEALING

For many complicated personal and ecclesiological reasons, it seems apparent that some priests fall into isolation and even despair; distance themselves from an ability to get in touch with and share their own vulnerabilities, and lose heart by estranging themselves from the truth of their priestly identity. Can something be done to help these priests before they fall too deeply, or perhaps to offer a safety net that would make the bottom less deep? Retrouvaille presents a wonderful model by suggesting priestly group ministry that focuses on the critical elements of self-disclosure, absolute honesty, granting and asking for forgiveness, and aiming at authentic change in oneself. As *Pastores Dabo Vobis* reminds the priest, the gospel demands a rigorous honesty if the priest is to seek perfection as the Lord asks: "You, therefore, must be perfect, as your heavenly Father is perfect" (Matt. 5:48).

In "On Truthfulness" (*Theological Investigations*, 1971) Karl Rahner writes that "the man of today suffers to no small extent from an incapacity to realize the meaning and value of truth in itself." There is a great deal of insight in this remark, applicable to the concerns of priests who isolate themselves and fall into inappropriate and even scandalous behavior. Rahner's point is likewise a challenge to all priests who live authentic, holy lives but do not share their inner truth with other priests. Retrouvaille has its Canadian roots in peer-to-peer ministry modeled on the recovery plan of Alcoholics Anonymous, which is reflected in many other twelve-step programs designed to foster rigorous honesty and authentic accountability in the context of peer support groups.

Priests who have lost the value of truth in their lives and those who sustain its value could help one another discover truth and come to see what all twelve-step programs affirm. When facing dishonest and destructive personal behavior, the problem is

always threefold: physical, mental and spiritual. While physicians and therapists can assess and diagnose many physical and mental illnesses, spiritual suffering is not as easily assessed, diagnosed, or treated. What is possible, however, is the decision to enter into a peer ministry that creates a healthy, safe, and prayerful climate for taking inventory of the symptoms that cause the spiritual problems at the heart of many difficulties in the priesthood today. Peer ministry, modeled on the recovery plan of Alcoholics Anonymous, other 12-step programs, and Retrouvaille, can do an immense amount of good to help priests minister to each other.

People in recovery testify that before they hit bottom and sought help, they sustained secretive behaviors in their lives. In *Out of the Shadows*, psychologist Patrick Carnes convincingly demonstrates that “keeping secrets” is the first step in addictive destructive behavior. Secret behaviors feed addictions and destroy any true sense of accountability. Many people have lost their homes, jobs, families, and even their lives due to secretive lifestyles.

Common to persons who lose their dignity and compromise their integrity is one clear fact: they have compromised truth in order to enable their secretive behaviors. Honesty becomes a relative term. They compromise the truth to get their way, become accountable to no one, and in the process destroy themselves. To move toward truthfulness in the company of other priests, three essential elements are necessary for priests who isolate, keep secrets, and engage in self-destructive behavior.

Parallel Behavior. Persons in recovery are models for those learning to live their lives all over again. One of the counsels in chapter 5 of the *Big Book of Alcoholics Anonymous* is “How It Works: If you want what we have and are willing to go to any length to get it, then you are ready to take certain steps.” To want what someone else has, one needs to “see” and “understand” what it is one lacks. Anyone new in recovery can usually identify the integrity and sincerity that others model for them and thus seek to incorporate these qualities in their own lives. Parallel sharing and parallel behavior are critical in group dynamics. Meister Eckhart’s comment is most apt: “Compassion begins at home with one’s own soul and body.” If a priest becomes divorced from his soul or body, he needs to rediscover himself with others who have traveled the road to recovery and thus experience authentic compassion for himself.

Accountability. Another tool necessary in recovery is accountability. In recovery groups, one is encouraged to have a sponsor—someone who will help another

through rediscovery and the sharing of his or her own journey. The development of accountability, the underlying factor in this relationship, is a slow process and does not occur within a set time frame. Letting go of secrets and becoming accountable is a never-ending process. Becoming accountable not only to a sponsor but to a group is important in rediscovery as one replaces unhealthy behaviors and relationships with healthy ones. For this reason, peer groups are critical in the process of recovery.

Rigorous Honesty. Being accountable and being rigorously honest are not the same thing. Being accountable at a group level occurs simply by “showing up” and serving the group when opportunities present themselves. Rigorous honesty, on the other hand, must be practiced. One can be accountable without being completely honest. One cannot, however, be completely honest and not accountable. The ability to recognize the truth in one’s thoughts, words, and deeds takes time. Anyone who has stopped asking for guidance from others regarding personal or public matters (e.g., one’s decisions, lifestyle, or ministry) must learn the process of rigorous honesty. The dishonesty that is lived and practiced by not allowing others into one’s life is in reality a coping technique to enable unhealthy behavior. By living dishonestly, one cuts oneself off from others and begins to isolate and live in one’s own world of distorted reality. For a person in this situation, a group provides a critical reality check. A parallel group lifts one out of one’s thoughts and delusions, and reinforces the benefit of being honest about secrets, fears, anxieties, and anything else that one has felt unable to talk about with others.

This group dynamic is as essential to twelve-step spirituality as belonging to a community is to being a Christian. The process of people sharing their common weaknesses with one another provides a unifying strength to live a healthy and integrated life. To let go of self and begin conversion lies at the heart of twelve-step spirituality.

PEER SUPPORT ESSENTIAL

Catholic priests today are spotlighted in many ways in multiple media and in statistical analyses. The popularity of Donald J. Cozzens’s *The Changing Face of the Priesthood* attests to this. Some priests have indeed developed poor behavioral patterns, sometimes brought on by stress, overwork, and a system that seems to close off the possibility of publicly addressing the real problems facing priests.

It is important to provide a climate in which priests can feel comfortable and safe in each other’s com-

pany, so that they can freely and confidentially discuss their brokenness and fragility, as well as their strengths, hopes, and ministerial successes. Priests who are living fractured lives need a type of twelve-step spirituality to enable them to rediscover their authentic priestly identity. A priest has no spouse and often no identifiable priestly community. While a minimum of accountability does exist in terms of performing certain tasks, attending meetings, and celebrating the sacraments, there is often no evaluative accountability to help assess the integrity of the priest himself. Simply put, a priest who performs his assigned duties can get away with almost everything else.

Finding adequate supports to stay well-grounded, both personally and spiritually, is not always easy for the priest today. For many priests, rectory living means living alone. For those who do live with other priests, a number of issues may prevent them from sharing their struggles with each other (e.g., differences in age, temperament, and theological outlook). Sadly, a number of rectories today are little more than hotels and provide minimal priestly fraternity and personal and spiritual support.

This state of affairs does not mean that authentic honesty and accountability never occur in a priest's life. Many priests commit themselves to consistent and honest spiritual direction. Obviously, many are aware of the need to disclose their lives in order to be healthy. The community of parishioners that a priest serves may well fuel his ministry and his ongoing desire to be a priest. But at the end of the day, when he is tired and alone, he needs more than his parishioners. A priest needs an opportunity to be part of a group of priest friends in order to develop an authentic sense of truth in his life.

The opportunity to lead an anonymous lifestyle is available for today's priest as a result of such factors as urbanization, technological developments (e.g., the Internet), and the availability of travel. The ability to "get lost in the crowd" and engage in anonymous behavior is relatively affordable. Behaviors that one may feel inhibited about doing in a public setting can now be done in private. Rolheiser's comment in *The Shattered Lantern* is insightful:

Looking at our culture we see a relentless movement towards greater privatization in virtually every area of life. For us, the ideal is to have a private car, a private office, a private home; and then, within that home, to have a private room, a private bathroom, a private phone, a private stereo system, and a private television set and video recorder. . . . Perhaps nothing is more apt, as a single image, to depict the movement towards excessive privacy than is the image of a shopper in a busy supermarket who has radio headphones covering his or her ears.

Such problems are at root spiritual, as they de facto influence the way a priest perceives himself, God, and others. Every priest must proactively search for creative ways to find the supports and accountability necessary to supplement his priestly lifestyle—supports best rooted in spiritual direction and priestly fraternity groups that demand accountability and rigorous honesty. Priests who get together for social and recreational reasons are providing a good and supportive ministry to each other. But more is needed in order to prevent the destructive behaviors we have too often witnessed in recent times.

Finally, it is tempting to think that the priest who makes use of the Sacrament of Reconciliation and has a good relationship with his spiritual director has found the solution to the spiritual problems that might be plaguing him. While sacramental confession and spiritual direction are superb and unique sources of grace, peer group commitment, especially for shattered priests, is critical for all the reasons already mentioned. Groups based in a twelve-step spirituality are essential for helping fragile and broken priests to face their shadow side and their hidden destructive behaviors. In this way, the process of letting go of one's self in order to become a fully integrated person becomes a significant spiritual tool that can help some priests reveal, and others rediscover, their true priestly identity and commitment. Just imagine if priests shared their experiences, strengths, hopes, and weaknesses with one another in the hope of finding a unifying spiritual strength to live wholly their priestly lives. Holiness of life, which bridges sacramental ministry, priestly responsibilities, and awareness of human limitations, would be significantly strengthened; a new day would dawn for many shattered priests; and the broken goblet would gradually be put back together.



Father Gerald D. Coleman, S.S., is the president and rector of Saint Patrick's Seminary in the Archdiocese of San Francisco, California. He has published widely in the field of moral theology.



Christopher J. Sellars, M.A., a seminarian for the Diocese of San Jose, is a pastoral year student at Saint Patrick's Seminary in Menlo Park, California.

The Present State of Formation

Leonard Kofler, M.H.M., Ph.D.

Since Vatican II, one of the most frequently occurring topics—and the focus of much attention in meetings of priests and bishops and at chapters of religious—has surely been that of formation. Many changes have been introduced into the process of formation, particularly in the area of human sciences. Subjects like psychology, sociology, and economics were introduced into the seminary curriculum. Structures have changed. There was a move from a “rule-oriented” to a “person-oriented” approach. Some formators are being prepared by attendance at courses of several weeks’ or even a year’s duration; others may prepare for several years. Candidates are being assessed, and in the process of formation, these assessments are being used and followed up on. Sometimes, if a candidate is not ready, a year outside the formation center is recommended, and counseling and therapy are provided. Documents on formation have been produced, and many articles have been written on the topic. All these are signs of great hope. Why should there be still further work and more articles?

I am concerned about the present state of formation, in spite of all the changes introduced since Vatican II. It seems to me that many additions, while good in themselves, lack integration in the person—and thus many of us in the church fail to present a message that is seen, understood, and experienced as relevant to the people of our time.

Students have indeed acquired, besides knowledge about God, knowledge about human beings and human society. Has this knowledge made them better priests or religious? Sadly, no, though they may be

more knowledgeable religious and priests. Has it helped them to relate better to God or to human beings? Some may think or hope so, but I have serious reservations about answering that question in the affirmative. If it has helped them, then I would expect our parishes to be more alive and vocations to be increasing.

PITFALLS OF ABSTRACT THINKING

The process of constant abstract studies, even of theology and psychology, instead of facilitating relationships with God and human persons, may alienate students. People who are involved in abstract thinking for years often lose contact with concrete reality because they tend to see all things in abstractions. They learn to relate to abstractions and not to God, human beings, the environment, or themselves. On the contrary, they may turn away from God because this abstract way of relating to God leaves them empty and unfulfilled. I am not surprised that some people who study theology end up being agnostics or atheists. They look at God as an object and not as a person, unless they spend a considerable amount of time in meditation.

While abstract studies have a place in the training of our priests and religious, they are not enough. Just as the abstract study of theology does not help us to establish a deeper relationship with God, neither does the abstract study of psychology help us to establish better relationships with human beings. We also need experiential theology and experiential psychology, or applied theology and applied psychology. Typically,

this is not what students receive in seminaries or universities. Professors and lecturers often fail to apply their abstract knowledge to concrete reality and concrete situations. Thus, it is necessary to train seminary staff to present material experientially so that students are able to apply it to their own lives.

PERSONAL FORMATION

Even more important is the need of those who come to formation to experience a personal spiritual renewal or conversion. Subjects need to be presented in ways that nourish students, candidates, and novices spiritually and psychologically. They need to go through a spiritual and psychological growth experience. Few centers, however, provide opportunities for deep personal conversion on a psychospiritual basis. Some are mainly spiritual and neglect the psychological dimension; others are mainly or exclusively psychological and neglect spirituality. Both aspects are important for holistic formation.

Students, candidates, and novices (and, indeed, many others who did not have an opportunity in their own formation) need to go through the process of psychospiritual integration through accompaniment by their formators. But who trains the trainers? Archbishop Madardo Mazombe, after the synod on priestly formation, came to the Institute of Saint Anselm to follow a seven-week course. He said, "Often during the synod we asked who will train the trainers. You are doing it here at the Institute." Yes, we are. However, a one-year course is not enough to prepare for this delicate work of formation.

DURATION OF FORMATOR FORMATION

From my experience over fifteen years, I am convinced that three years of training and formation of the formators prepares them and equips them adequately to help those entrusted to them for psychospiritual integration and growth. I believe that three years' preparation is the minimum requirement for most persons who prepare to be formators, to ensure that they have the security, integration, confidence, skills, awareness, and depth of spirituality needed for that ministry.

The first year helps prospective formators to acquire self-awareness and the necessary skills for formation. Many people are passive-aggressive yet unaware of it. Thus, they can do much damage to other people without ever realizing it or taking responsibility for their behavior. In priests and religious, this causes a lack of professionalism that will no longer be tolerated by society in the future. Formation needs to help students and formators become much more

aware of their personal behavior patterns and ways of relating and communicating with others. I could give many illustrations of parish priests' poor behavior toward parishioners and the parishioners' reactions. For example, "Our parish priest never greets us. It would be so nice if only he would say 'Good Morning'" or "Our pastor is a good builder, but don't contradict him. He does not take it lightly."

In the second year, formators in training can consolidate what they have learned in the first year and try to apply it in supervised accompaniment. In addition, they familiarize themselves more with group dynamics. After many weeks of hard work, they become confident in accompanying people and running growth groups. For some people this takes several months; for others, a whole year. When the newly trained formator become a novice mistress or a rector of a seminary, she or he needs to have a certain security; otherwise the strain becomes overwhelming.

The focus in the third year is the integration of psychology and spirituality. When they accompany people, formators need to be aware that they must do so on both the spiritual and psychological levels. Knowing when to move on to each level is a fine art that takes time to learn. There are many psychological obstacles that block spiritual development. Pure psychological development can become directionless without the spiritual dimension. It will be deprived of its spiritual resources and ultimate values. Pure spirituality often becomes a means of spiritualizing everything people encounter in their lives without working it through. After years of spiritualizing things, the cost to health and growth can be enormous. There may be much repressed anger or sadness, a lack of zeal and enthusiasm. There may be a feeling of not being fulfilled and happy. People who focus exclusively on the spiritual may come to feel terribly disappointed with God, to whom they gave their lives, expecting some happiness and fulfillment in return.

To become effective in accompanying students and novices requires an investment in training and experience. However, if the formator is able to accompany people well, the diocese or congregation will see a return in larger numbers of priests or religious and more fulfilled and happier people.



Father Leonard Kofler, M.H.M., D.Soc., Ph.D., is founder and director of the Institute of Saint Anselm in London, England, where religious and lay women and men are trained to become leaders and formators in the church.

The “Women’s Ordination” Question

George B. Wilson, S.J.

In this article I would like to start from a heated contemporary issue, the possibility of the ordination of women; use it to explore the ecclesiological question of the legitimating of public charisms; and then draw some conclusions about possible policy changes that could be seen as beneficial to our church at this juncture, regardless of one’s position on the ordination of women.

To tip my hand at the outset: I would personally be very happy if our church ever finds itself free to ordain women to the priesthood and acts on that freedom by actually ordaining them. I must, however, immediately follow that with a disclaimer: I used to be in favor of “women’s ordination,” but recently I have discovered that the phrase may have a sense in which I am decidedly not in favor of it.

To be asked whether one supports “women’s ordination,” it turns out, is not a simple proposition. The meaning of the question turns on many different assumptions that one might bring to it. Depending on those assumptions, one could be talking about exclusionary attitudes and the alienation they cause (I hope we’re all against them); church practice; basic church policy; the nature of ministerial service; the nature of church; and, ultimately, the soteriological intention of Jesus.

Now, that’s weighty stuff. To illustrate some of the

connections, let us consider a television program that was widely disseminated recently. The program was a fine reflection on the changes that have been and are taking place in our understandings of women religious and their ministerial role in the building of the kingdom of God. In its latter segments the program turned to the question of the ordination of women and presented some film clips from a recent meeting of the Women’s Ordination Conference. Some of the women interviewed spoke movingly of their personal call to priestly ordination and their pain at being excluded from it. Any sensitive listener would have to be impressed at the intensity of their conviction and the depth of their corresponding pain at being excluded from the possibility of ordination.

The same sensitivity might, however, detect another note in the speakers’ testimony, and that’s where the issue shifts. Some of the speakers seemed to be asking us to espouse a position that might in effect mean, “I have discerned that I am called to priesthood; therefore, it is unjust that I be denied my right to this ministry.” I may have misunderstood them, and if so I ask their indulgence; but the very possibility that my interpretation is accurate can guide us into some fruitful reflection.

If I understand correctly what is intended by the phrase “women’s ordination,” then I am opposed to

it. Indeed, in that sense I am opposed to men's ordination, my own included.

COMMUNITY INPUT ESSENTIAL

Any approach to the call to orders (or indeed, the call to any public ministry) that severs personal charism or call from its acceptance and validation by a community of the faithful who are to be served by it is surely a distortion of the meaning of ministry and the nature of the church. To accept self-authenticating call as an entitlement to orders or other forms of public ministry is to promote not church but sect. Ultimately, it would violate a Christian understanding of that interdependence of persons which alone is salvific.

In the Vatican II document *Lumen Gentium*, our church reached a significant new level of appropriation of the full meaning of the gospel when it proclaimed that "it has pleased God . . . to make men holy and save them not merely as individuals without any mutual bonds, but by making them into a single people, a people which acknowledges Him in truth and serves Him in holiness." If salvation is predicated upon the difficult demands of interdependence involved in becoming one people, it is hard to imagine that one of the substantive manifestations of the life of such a people—its public ministry—could be authenticated solely on the basis of the personal discernment of an individual Christian, regardless of that person's gender or personal conviction. A church minister must be called to that service by some level of Christian community—that is, by others. It is one thing to say that it is unjust that a group of persons can be excluded a priori from the possibility of a public ministry, without reference to the evidence of personal gifts that might be of service to a church community; it is quite another to say that it is unjust for the church community and not the individual to be the final decider as to one's suitability for a particular service to be exercised in the name of the church.

That fact brings with it the possibility that after evaluating the claimant's self-presentation, a church community may reach the painful conclusion that the individual may indeed be personally holy and even ministerially gifted, but that his or her gifts are not suited to the role of public minister in that particular church community or the church community in general. The community must always retain the responsibility for assessing those who believe they are called to public ministry, or else it could find itself hostage to mystifiers and rogues of all stripes. I hope it is not unfair to note that for centuries, and down to this day, individual males have thought they were

suitied for ordination and discovered that the church did not accept their self-assessment.

Which brings us to our present policy issue. Once one acknowledges that the church community must be the body that legitimates charisms that are to be exercised in the name of the church, the next questions are unavoidable: To whom should the responsibility for such judgment be entrusted? How centralized must the procedures for exercising this delegation be? What are the norms for its exercise? And how is the performance of those who exercise these judgments in the name of the community to be assessed? Even more intriguing, who is the community in whose name these decisions are being made, and how do its cultural norms enter into the process—if, as Vatican II tells us, "church" is in the first instance an inculturated reality?

At this point, for example, we might explore the fact that for many centuries, church policy did not allow the practice of absolute ordination (i.e., that a man could be ordained simply to be "a priest"); priesthood was tied to service in a particular local church. The Council of Chalcedon banned absolute ordination, and it was still being forbidden by local synods into the late eleventh century. Uncovering the process by which the localness of call yielded to our present practice of ordaining absolutely would make a fascinating study. The now centuries-old practice is not likely to be reversed, of course, but the history can serve to remind us of the church's freedom to locate a variety of powers at the level of the local rather than the universal church.

DETERMINATION OF SUITABILITY

So let's focus on the present operational procedures for determining whether a man is or is not suited to be ordained. This is the area in which several options may indeed be open to us, as many of the procedures are not in the realm of law but in that of prevailing (and frequently unexamined) custom. I would suggest that we consider two areas for immediate revision: the persons doing the evaluating, and one very specific criterion that should be high on the list of qualifications.

How does the process generally operate now? First, we observe that except for the smallest dioceses with the most extraordinary bishops, it is sheer romanticism to assert that the bishop who will actually ordain a man has any in-depth awareness of that man's suitability for ordained ministry. This is not a critique; it is simply a fact. Bishops rely on the judgment of others; they delegate responsibility for the assessment of a man's readiness. The rite of ordination itself has the bishop ask the presenter for his judg-

ment on the question. But if it is not the bishop who really makes the determination, who does? With what criteria? And on the basis of what competence?

In practice, the judgment is made by a seminary faculty or a committee of the same, finalized by the rector. Question: Is it fair automatically to assume that these people are best suited to make such judgments? Do they know the candidates best—or the kind of local church to be served, or the forms of service being called for? The practice is based on the assumption that, after all, these men have lived closest with the candidate and are therefore best suited to make the judgment. Might one not turn the argument around and raise the point that this very fact makes them the least suited to judge because they are too captured by the assumptions of their shared personal life (which more-disaffected people might call an old-boy network)? Why not have the ministerial assessment team that makes the final recommendation be composed largely of people who have received or will receive the ministrations of the man up for ordination: men and women not themselves ordained but qualified to judge how the man is likely to relate to a Christian community or, better, to the particular church in which he is going to minister?

Is such an arrangement going to ensure that mistakes won't be made and poor ministers won't be created? No—but when one sees men being ordained and then discovering within only one or two years that ministry isn't for them, isn't it fair to ask that we try for something better?

An alternative method might also gradually have an impact on the criteria issue as well. To put it bluntly, any seminary that is not preparing its candidates to relate to women as peers and to function constructively in communal projects with women as their leaders is doing a definite disservice to the future of the church in our country and should lose its accreditation. Bequeathing the church yet another 35 to 40

years of misogynist patriarchy is hardly doing us all a service.

Nor is this merely a matter of rhetoric to be satisfied in a seminary's catalog as it competes with other seminaries to get bishops or major superiors to enroll their students. It's a matter of attitudes that can easily be noted by a trained outside observer. It's a matter of skills that should be transmitted. It's a matter, finally, of changes that a candidate should either exert himself to make—or else he should be judged unsuitable and sent to find his arena of service elsewhere.

CHANGE NEEDED NOW

We may or may not be ready as a church to give a positive answer to the question of ordaining women. At the present moment, pushing for it may or may not be an effective strategy. In the meantime, it would be tragic for us to use all our energies in fruitless ideological warfare and fail to do those things that are already within our power to enable women (and lay men) to exercise their baptismal responsibility for the church by playing a significant role in determining the expectations to be placed on men who might feel called to the ordained ministry and deciding which men show the best promise of fulfilling those expectations. There are changes we can make now to improve our church's service within the culture in which God wills us to serve.



Father George B. Wilson, S.J., is an ecclesiologist who does organizational consulting with Management Design Institute in Cincinnati, Ohio. His e-mail address is gbwilson@choice.net.

The Way We Were

James Torrens, S.J.

tenth graders, swivel sitters
buzz-buzz in the back of the class

a baseball cap shadowing a face
touch-up with a compact during math

the beat, the motor running
pressure cooker of home thoughts

hug and a smooch between classes
ten-minute race to shoot hoops

loud, clannish, self-absorbed
wisecrackers and skeptics

today signed up for everything
tomorrow a change of plans

hey, the sky's the limit
(flying lessons tense)

the sluggard you just counted out
is up from the canvas all smiles

One evening in March, I paid my weekly visit to a family of English-speakers in Tijuana, Mexico, for a baptismal instruction. Hysteria reigned. Two of the teenage girls, it turned out, attended Santana High School, just across the border, where a student had opened fire earlier that day, killing two of his school-mates. Only the quick response of a security officer prevented more carnage and a likely suicide.

Just last November the voters of California approved an initiative that allows prosecutors to charge certain juveniles as adults without a judge's approval. The new law, it almost seems, went into place for this very shooting. Andy Williams, age 15, will go before a jury to be tried as an adult for two murders. Hundreds of other cases meanwhile await a higher court's review of the law affecting him.

As it happens, I have been teaching high school this year, for the first time since 1958. One of my classes, which I experience as a continual wrestling match, has left me, more than ever, feeling "Hats off to high-school teachers" (I would double that for middle-school teachers). These unsung heroes are dealing with the human being at its most restive, malleable, high-energy, idealistic, and unpredictable. And you

can add the word *explosive*. So the response of California voters to their recent initiative baffles me. How can anyone with an experience of teenagers mistake them for adults?

I mentioned the Santee shootings and the legal status of Andy Williams to my high-schoolers, who are in the equivalent of junior year. Their response astonished me. Certainly, they said, try him as an adult. One spoke out for the death penalty—this in a country, Mexico, that does not have it. They insisted that a teen, in fact even an eight-year-old, knows not to pull a trigger, not to take a life. Every young person, in their view, perceives this maximum no-no and is fully accountable.

In a sense these adolescents reproved me for underestimating them. Disruptive talk in class, resistance to homework—that is all a far cry, they as much as said, from manslaughter and other hurtful acts. The outlaws among their peers pose a great threat to the rest of them and need to answer for it. So, in the case of Santana High School, these young moralists would not give much of a hearing to psychologists or to any notion of mitigating conditions.

Adolescence, including moral indignation and bursts of generosity, does not fail to surprise. If the professionals who analyze it cannot agree whether it is the happiest period of life (as authors maintain in the *Encyclopedia of Social Science*) or the most distressing, a ceaseless Freudian *Sturm und Drang*, what are the rest of us to say? We can at least examine the phenomena. They all seem to cluster around egocentrism with a small “e”—that passing phase of normal self-absorption rather than the narcissistic fixation. Lots of big planning, endless talking, fantasizing, self-doubt, sense of invulnerability, mirror-gazing, shifting enthusiasms. It is a time for trying things out rather than settling on something, or on someone.

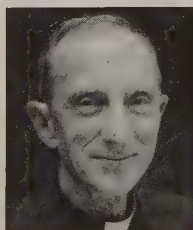
The word *adolescence* comes from the Latin *adolere* (to make a burnt offering on an altar; by extension, to burn and to blaze). Strangely enough, a related form, *adulesco*, means in Latin to become mature. This verb in its past participle form, *adultus*, gave us our word *adult*. How’s that for a sudden shift? Human maturing is hardly less paradoxical.

Historically, it seems, adolescence was, for millennia, very short. It is now very long. Mary, the mother of Jesus, had to take on her immense responsibility as a teenager, for the majority of women then and long afterward married in their teens. The majority of young men were pulled into daily manual work at the same age. In urban society, however, adolescence now stretches out into what Erik Erikson called the “psychosocial moratorium,” a delay of options and positions until some critical moment of clarity and decision.

There is so much preparing to do these days, so much freedom to be exercised among alternatives, so many conflicting values to sort out and complications of identity to resolve. Young women in particular have a world of opportunities once mostly closed to them and can protect themselves against pregnancy for as long as they choose. Maturity is often the loser in the process. It is much harder today, even in one’s twenties and thirties, to graduate from adolescence. This is true literally for the eternal student who, in a university, can never quite terminate the course. The present state of affairs seems well summed up in the title of a book I heard about in France, *l’Adolescence continue* (*Continuous Adolescence*).

Are the convent, the seminary, and even the priesthood partly calculated to keep one in adolescence? Spending without accountability, earning without income tax, late to bed and late to rise, rites of relaxation that become entitlements, a caustic view of the world, self-absorption even in spirituality—these tendencies or patterns do not smack of the age of responsibility. I do not consider myself entitled to throw stones. (Income tax? No clue.) And everyone knows how productive late-night people can be. Father Ted Hesburgh, as president of Notre Dame, reportedly stayed at work in his office until 2:00 a.m., profiting from the quiet of the wee small hours, and then slept in. He was no slouch in anyone’s book. But the adults in growing families do not often have that option.

Inescapably, if imperceptibly, the way we were is the way we are. The desirable thing is to accentuate or even revive the strong points as we graduate out of drawbacks. What might that mean? To keep the flame burning of early ideals and offerings to God, even when we have lost some of the steam and learned of our shadow side. To stay indignant at the injustices of the world. To encourage others toward the good. To be good-humored, and not at others’ cost. To toss a lot of things into the ocean of God’s pardon and so start today without being dogged by yesterday.



Father James Torrens, S.J., is a professor at the Universidad Iberoamericana in Tijuana, Mexico.

In a Father's Arms

Allan Schnarr, M.Div., Ph.D.

Abbba (Dear Dad): As you know, I am a teacher. Here is a written test for you: Imagine climbing into *your* father's lap. Let yourself snuggle into the soft strength that holds you in complete safety. Let go of all other concerns. Feel the love as palpable as the warmth flowing between your bodies. Cherish the moment. Let it last.

1. Would you even let yourself imagine it? If not, in one hundred words or less, explain why not, with specific reference to patterns of experience with your own father (or symbolic surrogates).
2. If you did give it a try, how did you feel being there? In two hundred words or less, identify at least three feelings and their historical derivatives in your relationship with your own father (or surrogates).
3. How long did you allow yourself to stay? In three hundred words or less, identify your willingness to return, with specific reference to what would be the healing value for you.
4. In no less than two thousand words, write a letter to your own father, identifying the implications of the above reflections for your relationship with God, who is called Father.

This is the assignment I received from God through the experience of your death. I've decided it's not a

pass-or-fail exam. I take it as a test of my willingness to learn from my relationship with you. It's been over five months since you died, and I just recently found my way back to your lap for the first time. Not that I had been refusing the test; I just never heard the call until a couple of days ago. Not surprisingly, it came from within me during prayer: "I need you to hold me." My own words were such a liberating revelation. As I let myself into the image, I could feel the healing of the vulnerability, which had gotten quite a grip on me. The old fear that any power greater than I would spoil things for me had crept inside me once again. This was gravely disappointing and difficult to face, given the outpouring of love I had felt while you were dying and in the weeks that followed. It was glorious how you surrendered to love and died so peacefully. It was wonderful feeling closer to you than ever before. As the weeks passed after your death, I barely let myself notice how you drifted away. Or was I the one drifting? So many other things seemed so much more important.

THE FEAR OF MEN

It's not that I hadn't felt close to you before. It's just that it surprised me, in hindsight after your death, to see clearly how much I was still holding myself back.

You and I talked about my fear over eight years ago. What has been obvious to both of us since then, though we never subsequently acknowledged it, was that a wholly new quality of loving connection between us began with facing the fear together. We didn't go into it in any great depth. All I really needed was for you to know how afraid I'd been. My telling and your acceptance resulted in a new beginning. Our eyes began making loving contact again. I'd rather not count, even if I could remember, how long it had been since we looked with trusting warmth into each others' eyes. We also began to say "I love you" regularly and deeply, from the heart. That was brand new. I know we both enjoyed the new life between us. Hence my surprise, after you were gone, to realize how much fear I still had.

What I learned long ago from you was to fear any power greater than myself. I think it's what fathers teach their sons (and probably their daughters too), unless they've been able to face the fear in themselves. I know that you learned it from your father, from his need for control, and from the punishments he administered when he was crossed. It's how men have been taking control for generations untold: might makes right; the one with the most power rules. I saw all this before we talked, and it made it easier to forgive you for the ways you had abused power with me. It's how men are, especially with each other. That's what I learned as I struggled through trying to make sense of all the ways I'd given away the power of my choices to men in positions of authority throughout my life. The list of the teachers and priests to whom I conceded control of my life would be long indeed. I trust that you get my point. It's not that I'm blaming you for all my issues with authority. What I'd like is for all men to accept responsibility for their own abuse of power. The consequences have been disastrous.

Accepting responsibility for the abuse of power means facing fear. As long as I can pretend I have everything under control, there's nothing to fear. That's the grand illusion with which so many men comfort themselves. The illusion is a prescription for tragedy. The struggle for control is "successful" only through power over others. Abuse of power through the negation of others' choices, thoughts, and feelings is inevitable. This negation of worth is profoundly humiliating. In my twenty years as a psychotherapist, I have observed that the more powerful any man is in terms of his position in the culture, the greater is his unacknowledged fear of humiliation. The logic is simple: having a choice means having my way. When things don't go my way, my lack of choice is exposed. There I am in the harsh light of all the ridiculing eyes, humiliated.

Humiliation is the exposure of one's lack of the power of choice. It is excruciating. The divine freedom inherent in human dignity is lost. Ironically, it seems to be the fear of humiliation that draws the would-be mighty into the power game. One must prove one's power of choice, thereby warding off the possibility of humiliation. Hence, any fear must not show. Fear is weak. Weakness is a loss of power. The loss of power is humiliating. Nor must the fear be acknowledged to oneself: self-doubt is for losers. It is a cardinal rule of the power game that the primary motivation (fear) must be ignored. Only the strong (fearless) survive. The fittest claim their Darwinian righteousness, and those at the mercy of fear follow them. God knows how many choices are based on the fear of men. How many men, women, and children are, at this moment, acting on this fear? What is the cost to human dignity?

THE COST OF CONTROL

I've spent a lot of years prayerfully observing the power game that men (and women and children wannabes) play. I'd like to identify some of the losses inherent to the game. These costly consequences must, of course, be ignored or devalued by those with the temerity to play. Dad, I hope you'll recognize you and me in every one of these.

Loss of Embodiment. The body cannot be the wide-open center of experiencing that it is for weak children. It must be harshly subjugated so that it serves as proof of power. Limits, needs, and unwanted information are betrayals of one's power. The body is simply an object, a tool to be used to get what's important (i.e., one's way). The bodies of others get treated in the same way as one's own.

Loss of Feeling. Real men know that feelings are irrational and uncontrollable. They are for women, children, and the weak men who are at their mercy. What a fine place the world would be if everyone would just be reasonable. Insensitivity to such distraction is nothing but strength of purpose.

Loss of Relationship. When it comes to having things under control, the only person I can really count on is myself. Others are only competitors. If someone else is in control, I am not. Hence, others become only pawns in the game. Whenever their personhood conflicts with my need for control, it can be ignored. Going along to get along is fine when it serves my righteousness. Ultimately, however, being right eclipses staying connected.

Loss of Presence. Players know that the past and the future are what matter. Past losses must be avoided. Future gains must be plotted. There is hard, thoughtful work to be done. The present moment is a distraction from what really matters. Enshrining the past ensures control of the future.

Loss of Coherence. Managing all of the above means that a lot of information must be ignored. The result is disconnected little packets of rationality. Contradictions between them are overlooked. As long as I just focus on this little piece of reality, everything is still under control. Even Hitler had his rationale.

Loss of Flexibility. No new information allowed. I already know what makes sense to me. I have already figured out how things work (for me). Challenges to my convictions are a threat to my control. They are viruses and will be exterminated.

Loss of Spirit. Given the above, the free-flowing life force that connects all beings is a dangerous concept. It must be brought under control, or religion will be a free-for-all (God forbid). If I am to be in control, free spirits cannot be allowed. There have to be rules, and even if I don't make some of them, I can still make them work for me.

FAITH OF OUR FATHERS

Powerful men stay in the game by successfully avoiding humiliation. None of the aforementioned losses happen to them—or at least they do not matter. The tragic narrowing of the divinity in humanity simply does not get noticed. Unfortunately (or not?), religious leaders are not exempt from the fear of humiliation and the consequences of its avoidance. Many engage in the righteous display of power over others in the name of God. What could be more important than revealing, and when necessary defending, God's truth? When God is on your side, what is there to fear? Not a question.

I took the prevalence of the abuse of religious power into account also when forgiving you, Dad. Your faith was so foundational to your identity. You were the head of the household, just as the pope is the head of the church. It was your job to train me to think and act in the right ways. Like the religious authorities you followed, you didn't notice what it cost me to submit to your reality. How could you notice how much of my inner world had to be denied, as if it didn't exist? How could you see my humiliating loss of the power of my own choices? Like the religious authorities you followed, you had been

taught to impose your way, as had your father before you. Most priests I met in my early years seemed to operate the same way. They had God with them in their corner on the truth. To think or feel otherwise was to be on the outside, against God. Being a sinner wasn't the worst. Heresy was the real evil.

I jumped, into what I thought was our corner on the truth for many years. It seemed so clear that the best way to be a person of worth was to be on God's side. We could take on all the losers who hadn't yet found the truth. And all those genuinely seeking the truth would look up to us as wise men. In hindsight I can see that I was pleased to have gone one better than you by entering training for the priesthood. I would be one of the benignly powerful who knew the truth and fearlessly proclaimed it. I would be a light shining on the mountaintop. I'd be so far above those losers in the valleys below. It was a little disturbing to me how difficult it was for many of my fellow seminarians to see the truth through my eyes. It was quite a shock to me, eventually, to recognize that I hadn't cornered the truth. Actually, I was the one who was cornered. And as for the thrill of the mountaintop, my fear of falling had me hypnotized. As a therapist working with men religious and clergy, I have met many who have come to this same staggering realization. The promise of quietly glorying, with righteous humility, in power over others is inevitably betrayed.

Ultimately, I could not tolerate continuing in the requisite submission to the truths of the more powerful; the lack of authenticity in my doing so became too costly. I didn't have the courage of Jesus to stand up to the powers that be and challenge the hypocrisy I perceived. I was too aware of my own hypocrisy, and too afraid of the power of those in authority to humiliate me if I differed with them. Furthermore, after so many years of telling people what I thought they wanted to hear, I was too unsure of myself to speak up about anything conflictual. So after ten years in a religious order, I emptied myself of the pretense of religious power. I left the priesthood and religious life. Making that decision was the single most frightening moment of my life. What leverage did I have in the power game now?

I had done my best to follow in the footsteps of Jesus and surrender to God the Father (and his representatives). In my twenties, after ten days of a thirty-day Ignatian retreat, I hit rock bottom. I realized that I was trying to manipulate God, to impress him with how good I was at imaginative prayer. All I could do for the next twenty days was to let God hold me. It was a sacramental beginning of the healing that I've nurtured in so many ways since then. A couple of

years later, on retreat again, I willed myself to surrender to the Father. I wrote a poem that I put on my wall and prayed for years. I kept saying the prayer because it was so clear to me that my mind was choosing it, but my heart was not in it. I had little idea at the time how far I had to go in learning to trust anyone who could be a father. Without willfully swimming against some strong internal stream, I couldn't keep myself attentive to trusting an image of a father. Without noticing, I gave up and shifted my focus to Jesus. No one called him father, and he was so different from the men I'd known. Him I could trust. I longed to spend time with him. It was effortless. I fell in love. We bonded.

I just ignored the fact that he was a man. Gender was irrelevant anyway. Love was what mattered. Love was all I needed. Ultimately, I saw love as the pearl of great price. Little by little, I turned to finding it in relational experience with embodied humans, which included relationships with women. Not surprisingly, they seemed more open to love, more trustworthy, less caught up in the power game, less likely to be the cause of humiliation.

THE NEW COVENANT

It wasn't until after your death, when I saw your life through the prism of the way you died, that I realized you and I were traveling the same path. When I saw the whole sweep of your life, it was suddenly so evident how much you too had been following in the footsteps of Jesus. He also grew up in a world where powerful men laid down the law to ensure their fearful control. He saw the tragic consequences of the self-righteousness dominance of others. He emptied himself of any pretense of power over others. Instead he chose to hang out with the lowly—with fisherman, tax collectors, sinners, even prostitutes. After spending so much time with him, it became clear to me that all he ever did was love them and teach them how to love each other.

Love is what you and I focused on after we talked about abuse and fear. I saw how you had already been mellowing out of the need to have everything your way, to have the last word. Gradually, over the years, you had become more relational, more attentive and receptive to the experience of others. I knew your faith had been a primary source of this softening. At the time I could not conceive how completely you would be able to surrender to love.

In your last days, when your heart and lungs were failing, you gave yourself so humbly to the care of your wife and children. Being reduced to the status of a needy child would once have been an intolerable humiliation for you. Yet here you were, humbly re-

**To Jesus,
God was a loving person
who guided his choices
and with whom he was
free to be himself**

ceiving whatever you needed. The outpouring of love among your family held you so securely that you were peacefully able to let go of any pretense of control and to surrender to death. There we were, around your bed, in your home, singing hymns and love songs as you left your suffering body behind. No fight. No struggle. No control. Simply communion, lasting forever.

We saw how you trusted love, how you surrendered without fear. I imagine your soul saying, without words, "Into your hands, I commend my spirit." I wonder, though, if you began with the word "Father." Had *love* and *father* become synonymous for you? Had you come this far?

THE FATHER'S LOVE

Jesus called God, the omnipotent creator of all that is, Daddy Dear (Abba). This is the foundational uniqueness, say many Christologists, that differentiated him from the faith of his fathers. In the Hebrew tradition, God was "I am who I am," the *mysterium tremendum*, the unknowable and wholly overpowering Other. One could not look on the face of God and live. To Jesus, God was a loving person who guided his choices and with whom he was free to be himself. God was like a good father. In another culture, at another time, Jesus may well have experienced this wise and loving person as a good mother. Perhaps it was part of his intuitive genius to know that the image of father was in great need of healing. Jesus spent regular, intimate time communing with the good Father who had shown himself to him. Clearly, it was here that he felt known and accepted just as he was. Within this relationship he came to understand the divine power of his own freedom.

Jesus realized himself in the image of his Father. When he referred to himself with the words "I am who I say I am," he was accused of heresy and blasphemy. Ultimately, the religious authorities had him killed because they could not control him. When he said to them, "You have no power over me," he revealed to everyone the freedom that love engenders. His Father's love had set him free to love others in kind. He did not have a father who said, "Go, overpower others as I have overpowered you. Then you too can be free of humiliation." Nor did he relate to others in any way that was humiliating for them. His way of relating to others was simply a mirror of how his Father related to him. He simply loved them as they were and encouraged them to be true to themselves. In so doing, he revealed the true nature of a father's love. A loving father reflects to others the divine freedom alive within them. A loving father reveals the truth from within himself (I am who I am) and welcomes the same from others. A loving father relates in a way that says, "We may all be true to ourselves with each other."

Dad, I know that you discovered and nourished this love in your family. I would say that it was exactly this kind of love that flowered in fullness around you as you approached death. I believe that as you let go of your body here, it was this kind of love that you recognized in the arms of the Father waiting to receive you. I imagine you snuggling into his soft and warm lap, releasing all the fear of humiliation that once gripped you. I see you breathing freely, knowing that at last everything you are has found a home. I'm smiling as your head turns and our eyes meet. Here I am, with you in the truth that matters most to us. It's you and me, two men together, safe in His arms.



Allan Schnarr, Ph.D., a licensed clinical psychologist, is on the staff at Claret Center in Chicago, Illinois. He also teaches at the Institute of Pastoral Studies at Loyola University and the Christian Institute for the Study of Human Sexuality.

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Women Religious at Midlife

Carmel Seibold, R.N., Ph.D.

This article discusses the experiences of four midlife nuns, who were part of a qualitative study of twenty single midlife women, conducted in the 1990s in Melbourne, Australia. The study explored single women's experiences of midlife and menopause and the processes of managing health and reshaping identity. Data were collected via two interviews that were twelve months apart; in the interim, the women kept diaries.

The focus of this article is women's embodied experience. Analysis of the data showed that while menopause is socially shaped, taking place within the context of everyday stresses and social networks and reflecting women's search for knowledge, it is also profoundly embodied. Although the women in this study were encouraged to reflect on midlife and menopause, they were asked no specific questions about their prior experiences. Yet in the interviews and diaries, the women reflected a great deal on their premenopausal/premidlife bodies as they struggled to come to terms with present experiences. As they told their stories, their bodies remained a constant point of reference. Integrating past bodily experiences, as well as dealing with current changes, appeared to be an important aspect of identity construction in midlife. Whether the women were reflecting on their relationship to their

bodies in terms of sexuality, control of fertility, the need to rest, or keeping their bodies "working" for employment, an overall theme emerged: in general, these women were seeking wholeness and integration of mind and body.

THEORETICAL CONTEXT

The women's emphasis on their ongoing experience of their bodies, and on an embodied sense of self, directed me to feminists' and others' accounts of embodiment as an important aspect of constituting self-identity. Anthony Giddens's theory of "the reflexive project of self," delineated in the book *Modernity and Self-Identity*, maintains that we construct an ongoing life narrative. Integrating bodily experience, both conscious and unconscious, is essential to this process. This, together with Pierre Bourdieu's notion of "bodily praxis," a process of knowledge acquisition, through embodiment, that is below the level of consciousness, and R. W. Connell's theory of "body reflexive practice," in which prior bodily experience is implicated in future life choices, resonated with the data. This was particularly so where the women recalled past bodily experiences and choices. Drew Leder's contention that severe disruption of a previously taken-for-granted or integrated body has the

potential to threaten “the very routines and goals by which we define our identity,” and the consequent need to devote conscious effort toward integrating mind and body, were also particularly useful for understanding responses to physical breakdown, as well as to severe menopausal symptoms.

INFLUENTIAL THEMES

Social and cultural discourses were seen as interacting with bodily experience in constituting identity throughout the women’s lives, and their stories provided clues about the discourses in which their embodied experiences were situated. Discourses that influenced the women’s experiences concerned the mind/body divide, power and pleasure, and issues of power and knowledge related to the control of women’s bodies through the socialization of procreative behaviors. Intersecting all three were feminist contributions and interpretations, seen as both contributing to and challenging these discourses.

The discourse on the mind/body divide sees the body as a prison, a form of confinement. As Susan Bordo notes in her book *Unbearable Weight: Feminism, Western Culture, and the Body*, this has been a consistent theme in Western thought: Plato depicted the body as alien, as not self; Augustine saw the body as the enemy and stressed the need to control it; Descartes represented the body as a machine needing to be dominated by the mind. Feminists contend that this approach has influenced a range of practices, including those of medicine. Emily Martin, author of *The Woman in the Body*, argues that the Cartesian view helped shape the way medical texts depicted bodily functions as mechanistic and subservient to the mind, and that this in turn influenced women’s experiences of their bodily functions. In studying women’s experiences of menstruation, childbirth, and menopause, she found that many women are alienated from their bodies.

Ironically, in the late 1960s and early 1970s, some egalitarian feminists—including Germaine Greer, author of *The Female Eunuch*, and Shulamith Firestone, author of *The Dialectic of Sex*—were responsible for further reinforcing the mind/body divide. Believing that if women were to be seen as equal to men, the biology-as-destiny argument needed to be challenged, they posited “androgyny,” a social situation transcending gender. Social constructionists further reinforced denial of the female body by arguing that it is simply a biological entity that has been (negatively) coded by a dominant patriarchal entity. Both approaches had the effect, as Elizabeth Grosz points out in *Volatile Bodies*, of “neutralizing the sexually specific body.”

The mind/body divide discourse was especially influential for women coming of age in the 1960s and 1970s, when a puritanical denial of the body and a feminist discourse that sought to deconstruct the notion of the inferiority of the female sex set up the ideal conditions for denial of the body—or, at best, an uneasy relationship with it. Women who later questioned the negative aspects of the mind/body split did so as a result of both personal experience and exposure to more recent social theory, including that of “difference feminism,” which accentuates women’s experiencing their bodies in powerful and liberating ways.

The Australian study revealed that another set of discourses influencing the women’s experiences of their bodies pertained explicitly to sexuality. Michel Foucault, in *The History of Sexuality*, argues that discourses around sexuality are imbued with power and pleasure. He identifies several discursive constructions, all requiring management of tensions between power and pleasure. One’s sexual identity, he contends, is the public representation of sensual aims and objectives, constructed through a definite practice of or discourse on sexual expression. He maintains that in the nineteenth century and the early twentieth century, individuals were increasingly exposed to a multitude of discourses “defining and proliferating sexualities,” including those relating to heterosexual relations within the nuclear family. Women coming of age in the 1960s and 1970s primarily saw their identity within the context of the nuclear family and monogamous heterosexual relations. They were thus both produced by, and recognized their identity in, a discourse stressing heterosexual dependence. Wendy Hollway has termed it the “have/hold” discourse because of its emphasis on finding sexual satisfaction and joy only within the family. An accepted alternative to this, for some women, was embracing religious life.

While acknowledging that women wield some power within the nuclear family, Rosalind Coward, author of *Female Desire*, emphasizes the power imbalance that exists within a system that advocates and reinforces a patriarchal notion of heterosexual dependence. Other feminists have also explored the complex relationship between power relations and the experience of sexual pleasure in relation to women’s sexual identity. Hollway, for example, maintains that at any given moment, several equally influential and potentially contradictory discourses can coexist and make available different positions and different powers for men and women. She sees the “have/hold” discourse and the “permissive” discourse, which explicitly challenge the principle of monogamy, as two such contradictory discourses.

Both were available to the women in the Australian study when they were coming of age; the reasons individuals chose to align themselves with one discourse or the other related to the degree of investment or reward involved.

While many from this generation of midlife women choose to position themselves in the “have/hold” discourse, as defined by the traditional gender-differentiation discourse advocating attractiveness, femininity and passivity, it would be naive to assume that some women do not experience a high degree of control and pleasure within this context. Bordo has analyzed contemporary positioning in the context of the “politics of appearance” and sexuality and has concluded that, contrary to cultural feminists’ claims, power relations are complex, and power and pleasure do not necessarily cancel one another out. Women reaching middle age will have been exposed to contradictory discourses about power and pleasure, and each individual’s life situation will have a bearing on the influence of a particular discourse.

Another set of discourses, closely related to those regarding power and pleasure, concern procreative behavior. Foucault saw these as regulating sexuality and fertility through the control of individual bodies, and regulating the social body via the socialization of procreative behaviors through marriage and birth control. Women’s bodies, according to Foucault, became subject to modern science from the beginning of the eighteenth century. Not only did this have the effect of ascribing pathology to them; it also placed the responsibility of ensuring fecundity with women. The advent of sophisticated methods of contraception, particularly the contraceptive pill, has resulted in a controlled fertility that fulfills the responsibility to the family without impinging on the need for many women to work outside the home. At the same time, there is an expectation that women will be the primary caregivers for young children. For those in a heterosexual relationship, the result is a constant monitoring of the body in order to ensure controlled fertility. For others, celibacy becomes the means of controlling fertility.

Medical discourse, as part of the social body, is implicated in this process and has played a major role in promoting forms of contraception. Feminists of the sixties and seventies hailed contraception as a form of liberation for women. It was not until the 1980s that feminists began to question the role of social agents in the marketing of the contraceptive pill and to express concern at the minimal research carried out prior to marketing. For women reaching midlife in the 1990s, contraception, regardless of marital status, was not just a right but a

duty. As women reach the end of fertility—a life stage often accompanied by loss of a partner—prior contraception choices, as well as a choice for celibacy, may be questioned and even regretted.

EXPERIENCES OF FOUR NUNS

This article explores the accounts of embodied experience of four nuns: Alice, age 47; Della, age 49; Georgie, age 51; and Deidre, age 53 (the names used here are pseudonyms). All four had a background in teaching or administration and pastoral care. Following Giddens, I argue that the women, in recalling their past bodily experiences, were seeking to incorporate them into a life narrative as an ongoing process of constituting subjectivity or identity. In the context of the identified discourses, I propose that reflecting on embodied experience is an important part of dealing with body changes and constructing an identity in midlife. In emphasizing the role of embodiment in forging a midlife identity, I also acknowledge the phenomenological aspect of experience, contending, in the words of Catherine Turner, that women are “feeling and being agents” as well as “thinking and choosing agents.”

At different times in their lives, the women positioned themselves relative to particular discourses. However, they were never free of the influence of others. Over time, as the women reflected on their choices and were exposed to new and potentially contradictory discourses, changes in positioning occurred. Personal history—of which bodily experience was a part, often at a level below consciousness—influenced the choices they made and their identity construction.

SUBLIMATING THE BODY

There was a striking similarity to the experiences of the four nuns. On entering religious life between the ages of 17 and 19, each embraced a way of life or tradition emphasizing sublimation of the body. In historical terms, the mind/body divide discourse has permeated the quest for union with God. Women religious have suffered the added burden of vestiges of the belief that women are unclean and potentially corrupting. In taking up the way of life of a woman religious in a patriarchal church, the aim was to embrace Christ as the bridegroom and to strive for transcendence. Along with unquestioning obedience, this set up an ideal situation for the denial of their bodies and their sexuality. Negotiating their position as women in religious life meant, over time, renegotiating their embodied self in terms of the mind/body split and alternative discourses.

The mind/body divide and experiences of celibacy and sexuality combined to influence how the four nuns both denied and acknowledged their bodies. All recounted early experiences that focused on denial of the body; this was described as a feature of a Catholic upbringing, which emphasizes the body as a temple of the Holy Spirit. A decision to enter a convent at a relatively young age meant exposure to a discourse further stressing the sublimation of the body. As Georgie said, "Christ was the bridegroom, and body transcendence was the goal."

The women spoke of the premenopausal body as something to be both denied and controlled. Rather than recounting specific experiences as a young woman, Deidre reflected on her continuing tendency in midlife to treat her body as "an ageless machine," just as she had done all her life. Alice said, "We were taught to negate our bodies; we were trained to bring them into line." All were strongly influenced by an Augustinian notion of the body as the enemy. Paradoxically, denying the body often meant that they appeared to be more consciously aware of it than other women their age. The body as a vehicle for the mind was a strong theme within their language, suggesting that they related to their bodies as objects. Alice actually referred to her body as "a machine that had to work for you," adding: "It worked for me, and I demanded it to work. . . . I had never really entered into a relationship with my body."

Her words convey a sense of an objectified body, seen only as a vehicle for the mind. They also convey a sense of the way in which the church positioned her, as opposed to allowing her to select from a range of potentially conflicting discourses. This lack of choice is reflected in Della's and Georgie's accounts as well. They too took denial of the body for granted. However, the body rebelled periodically, demanding attention. The only legitimate way to create an opportunity to rest and have time out was to become ill. Alice recalled:

I got the flu every year when I was teaching. Once I stopped teaching I didn't get the flu again, and it was a couple of years later [when] I realized that I hadn't got the flu. It was through that welfare work and a course of study [Master of Pastoral Care] that I came across this notion—it was like a revelation—and I thought, "So that's what that was, I wanted out." I remember being so relieved once when I had the flu: "Great. Three weeks off!"

Alice was not the only one who spoke of using illness as a legitimate way to get out of work and create a space to rest. Della and Deidre also recalled "manufacturing the flu every year" in order to get out of the constant demands of work. Georgie

did not remember becoming ill on a yearly basis, and said of her long hours and hard work, "I loved my work. I loved what I was doing." However, after a particularly grueling two years setting up a new school, she felt her body had failed her. "I experienced a real burnout when I was 38," she said. "I had been moved from one school to another, a whole new ministry, and a new secondary school. I sort of started the year all right but had no idea that my whole physical health had broken down, and then I collapsed and was paralyzed for a couple of months." Georgie saw this experience as a "turning point." She felt that her body had broken down in order to give her space to reflect on her life and make the necessary changes, including "taking care of myself." She said her body was wiser than she, implying that her conscious self would not have given in to the need to rest. After the breakdown, she said, she "felt totally empty and physically incapable of getting back on [her] feet." During this time of physical and emotional crisis, she questioned her vocation and her faith. Part of recovery was a need to get in touch with her inner life and acknowledge needs she had previously ignored, including the need to acknowledge her sexuality. At this time, strong feelings about celibacy arose. Georgie said that while she had been able to express her maternal feelings with the "kids" she taught, she now experienced the lack of someone in her life as "a void, an emptiness." Nevertheless, she rejected an opportunity to pursue an intimate relationship and leave the order, because she was "very serious" about the promises she had made, adding, "I kept asking God, 'Where are you when I need you,' but he wasn't answering." When asked if she saw this period of questioning as specific to her being a nun, she said, "Well, I think everyone reaches a point where they . . . have to . . . choose between one road or another." For both celibate religious women and others, she said, "there's a certain compromise that you make with life. . . . because you've chosen this, you've said no to that."

Committed to a religious life emphasizing service to others, Georgie found that one of the things that helped her meet life's challenges and make the necessary compromises was individual counseling, through which she was exposed to contemporary feminist discourse that emphasized valuing the feminine body. This started a process of questioning that took her in new directions.

DENIAL OF BODY

All four nuns acknowledged that within the Catholic tradition, and particularly as nuns, they were, as Alice said, "encouraged to deny our bodies."

They were positioned in a discourse that not only saw them denying their bodies' need for rest but also left them confused as to their gender identity. Alice recalled her sense of confusion that a lifestyle she had willingly embraced exacted a heavy toll on her sense of self. She had experienced a period of distress and confusion in her mid-twenties. Her superior in the order, recognizing her distress, called Alice into her office. After Alice had expressed some of her concerns about her sense of being nameless, faceless, and sexless, her superior replied: "Alice, there's something you need to recognize. There are three sexes in this world: men, women, and nuns."

Alice replied, "That's exactly how it feels."

Her superior told her about the changes heralded by the Second Vatican Council, adding, "But change is coming. We'll be able to be women."

Alice said the changes helped her to acknowledge a whole set of sexual feelings, needs, and desires as "OK." At this time she also discovered masturbation, which helped her "get in touch" with her body and stop denying its needs. Alice said she was aware of "a glimmer of light" as a more liberal approach to life within religious orders was adopted. The changes, however, appear to have been mostly on an intellectual level, and despite Vatican II, all four nuns continued to be ambivalent about their bodies.

Denial and resentment of their bodies, including their functions, was the result of containment in a discourse emphasizing control by the mind, as well as denial of female sexuality. Menstruation was viewed as a painful nuisance that interfered with their ability to perform. As a celibate woman, Della found the inconvenience of menstruation particularly galling: "I used to bitterly resent bleeding every month. That really pissed me off. It was so inconvenient and, after all, for no purpose. I hated it. Initially, I used to get all these cramps and pain and stuff, and I thought it was normal." Deidre, too, suffered from painful periods and, as she aged, found premenstrual tension an increasing problem, interfering with her ability to "perform efficiently."

For Alice, heavy periods and painful symptoms were kept in the private realm until they began to impinge on her public role: "I never knew if it was normal or not . . . and other women didn't talk about it . . . What finally got me to the doctor was when I was in a woman's home [visiting in the role of parish assistant], and she was very nervous about my presence, and she had me sitting . . . on a white velvet lounge . . . that's when I decided it was time to go [to the doctor]."

For all four nuns, denial of their bodies also meant denial of their sexuality and procreative potential, reinforced by a strict code of silence and the impli-

cation that donning a nun's habit negated physical attractiveness and sexuality.

Although there had been significant changes in religious orders in the 1970s, a degree of ambivalence was still experienced. Georgie explored this a little further when discussing a recent lecture given by a priest: "This young Jesuit said that until I've said no to my motherhood [wish to have children], I will never ever come to terms with celibacy [and, by extension, sexuality]. So immediately after the lecture, I got him by the earhole and said, 'I will never ever say no to my motherhood.'"

ACKNOWLEDGING WOMANHOOD

Three of the four nuns identified particular incidents or markers that had caused a change in their sense of an embodied self. For Georgie, the physical experience of her body breaking down in her late thirties was one such marker. This, along with counseling, had caused her to pursue ways of acknowledging her body's vulnerability and attempting to balance work and leisure. In her mid-forties, she attended retreats and self-development seminars with a strong feminist focus. These stressed a woman-centered approach to religion and acknowledged the body and sexuality, offering opportunities for further reflection. Discussing the incident with the Jesuit priest in the light of this alternative view, Georgie concluded that as celibate religious, most priests and nuns are probably coming from very different directions. The seminars had helped her to understand that acknowledging her sexuality and her choice of celibacy meant not a denial of her bodily potential but an incorporation of it into her sense of self. In challenging the young priest, Georgie not only questioned the notion of domination of the body by the mind but actively resisted it.

In Alice's case, a sympathetic superior in the order, as well as the changes that occurred as a result of the Second Vatican Council, started a process of acknowledging her sexuality. Seeking help from a gynecologist for painful menstruation and flooding and eventually undergoing a hysterectomy meant achieving a far more comfortable relationship with her body. Exploring the connection between the denial of her femaleness and the operation, Alice commented on how many nuns ended up with hysterectomies, saying, "I suppose you spend so much time trying to ignore it, you end up with problems." Nonetheless, from her perspective, the hysterectomy proved beneficial; the resulting relief from painful menstruation positively influenced Alice's attitude to her body.

A visit to a chiropractor to seek help for painful menstruation was significant for Della, who said, "I

had periods without pain for the first time at age 34." Even without the pain, she said, she continued to bitterly resent menstruation. At the age of 40, learning to use tampons and seeing a counselor brought her to "a turning point." She began to unravel the connection between menstruation, denial of her body, and her essential "womanliness" in order to come to terms with herself. She said, "I needed to come to terms with my sexuality, acknowledge it, and 'live in harmony with my body.'" At this time Della was also exposed to a feminist discourse that stressed valuing the female body.

The nuns' reports of sublimating their bodies during their twenties and thirties represent the extreme end of a continuum. On entering a religious order, they had voluntarily chosen celibacy in an era in which this meant denial of their bodies and, for all intents and purposes, of their sexuality and procreative potential. While their stories may appear to be distressing accounts of the exploitation of young women before they are old enough to make a choice, they also contain evidence of choices consciously made and of pleasure and passion, even ecstasy, experienced as a result. Entry into religious life could be seen as choosing a form of sexual expression manifested as union with God.

Two of the nuns reflected on prior choices in the context of their current lives. Della grappled with the notion of freedom of choice, noting that although she may not really have known what she was doing when she entered the convent from boarding school, she was probably similar to girls who marry at a young age, adding, "I think we [all] make decisions on a day-to-day basis. I know I didn't want to be sent home [from the novitiate]. If I acknowledge now that I didn't know what I was doing, I negate a whole part of my life." Putting her past decisions and experiences into perspective helped her understand her identity in a coherent way.

Georgie also reflected on her decision to enter religious life, remembering that she had worked for a year prior to entering the convent in order to be sure she was doing the right thing. In recalling the euphoria she experienced, she revealed her degree of investment in choosing religious life and the positive aspects of this choice: "It's hard to explain the feeling—the whole thing of Christ as the bridegroom. I was just so happy for that first year. It was an ecstatic feeling . . . an experience that stays with you." Despite ongoing doubts about celibacy, Georgie remained committed to her way of life.

There is a tendency in recent times to see religious life, with its strong emphasis on the spiritual and its rejection of the material, as negating the

self. As these four women's stories show, sublimation of the body was not experienced as an entirely healthy practice, but other factors of celibate life were experienced as positive and life-enhancing. Although all four nuns had experienced confusion and doubt at some point in their lives, all, as midlife women, had chosen to remain within their orders. They all spoke of the rewards they had obtained as religious, including a close relationship with God and a sense of being valued as midlife women.

In her thirties, Alice had spent eighteen months out of the convent. Although she was unhappy about many aspects of what she termed the "institutional church," which she saw as "imprisoning the Eucharist," she chose to return and work within it or "on the margins." Della expressed a similar attitude when she said, "I don't always have to stand by the institutional church." Alice, Deidre, and Della had, like Georgie, been given opportunities in their forties, via workshops, individual counseling, and seminars, to explore themselves and their relationship with the church. Through this process, they were able to achieve a more comfortable relationship with their bodies. The seminars and workshops they attended all had a strong feminist flavor, acknowledging God as both mother and father and questioning the previous patriarchal bias toward transcendence and a hatred of the body and nature. Not only, therefore, were they resisting the traditional discourse stressing the mind/body split and repositioning themselves with regard to it; they were also continuing, in midlife, to be actively involved in managing their now-menopausal bodies.

It was clear that while the body was central to the women's experiences and sense of themselves throughout their lives, their identity in terms of embodiment was also actively constructed. All the women in the study reflected the influence of several discourses operating at different strengths. The influence of the mind/body split was particularly evident in the nuns' stories, which showed that they tended to treat their bodies as objects to be brought under control. However, more than any other group of women, the nuns demonstrated active repositioning and striving for integration in midlife, in the light of exposure to alternative discourses.

The reflection the women engaged in appeared to be directed toward integrating their past bodily experiences as they recalled compromises they made in order to achieve a degree of equilibrium. Having thought they had achieved it in their forties, they found themselves facing further adjustment with the onset of menopause and midlife. Embodied identity, always precarious, continued to be negoti-

ated. While the majority of women spoke of having reached a point, by early midlife, of being relatively at ease with their bodies, the onset of severe menopausal symptoms produced disruptions that could not be ignored. Furthermore, these women, along with those not experiencing severe menopausal symptoms, were coping with changes associated with aging in the context of discourses about youth, beauty, and associated power and pleasure.

UNPREDICTABLE MIDLIFE BODIES

These women—including Georgie and, to a lesser extent, Deidre—spoke of a heightened bodily awareness in relation to such menopausal symptoms as hot flashes, interpreting those symptoms as the “body being out of control” and having a “mind of its own.” The body was now perceived as “other.” For those women who had reached a point of being relatively in tune with their bodies, this meant a significant shift in the way they interpreted their bodies. Georgie expressed her experience in these terms: “This was a real feeling that you had suddenly . . . like you were a puppet and someone else was pulling the strings. And you didn’t have the strength or ability to suddenly grab hold of it and say, ‘It’s my life, I’ll do with it what I want to do.’ And so you really felt that there was someone else taking over your life, you were sort of flying blind.”

The reference to “someone else taking over your life” suggests not only a sense of standing outside one’s body (which had suddenly become present in an uncomfortable way) but also a rupture in one’s sense of autonomy. Georgie said although she wanted to take back control of her life, she found that this was not easy. As with the pain experience described by Leder, disruption caused by physical symptoms meant that a conscious effort was now needed to bring the body back into balance. This did not appear to be solely related to an expressed need for control in order to function, particularly in the workplace. Although all the women with significant symptoms expressed a need to manage those symptoms in order to fulfill obligations, they also referred to a desire to integrate mind and body by bringing the body back into control.

The women’s embodiment, then, was experienced in a complex way. Bodily reality was both the center of the experience and also the means by which the women judged or assessed their experiences. The feeling that their bodies were out of control resulted in an expressed need to reestablish such control. This desire for control appeared to operate on two related levels. One involved the public world of work and responsibilities; the other concerned

bringing their bodies back into balance and restoring mind/body harmony. The lack of harmony and balance was experienced as threatening, not just to the routines and goals by which identity was defined (e.g., in the workplace) but also to the view of self as competent agent.

The nuns’ menopausal sleeplessness, associated with night sweats, resulted in tiredness and reduced energy. This in turn resulted in a sense of vulnerability and a perceived reduction in their ability to cope with the demands of work. Increasing forgetfulness and emotional lability meant a fear of being labeled. Their bodies, sweating excessively and unexpectedly, or leaking, were perceived as no longer predictable or reliable.

The majority of the women experiencing symptoms, including Georgie, saw taking hormone replacement therapy (HRT), at least initially, as increasing their choices and giving them a sense of control—not just in managing their lives but also in integrating mind and body. Not one of the women who commenced HRT for the relief of menopausal symptoms referred to a dominant medical discourse. Georgie maintained that without HRT, she would not have managed to deal with many of the problems that had surfaced at midlife.

Once taking HRT, the women monitored it, and their bodies’ physical response formed part of this process. Several women referred to “listening to their bodies” in recalling the decision to cease HRT. For example, Georgie ended HRT partly on the basis of increasing bodily unease. She had become aware of symptoms “like the worst premenstrual tension” when she was on the progesterone cycle. She wrote in her diary, “I think my body is trying to tell me something. I’ve decided not to take HRT this cycle to see if the progesterone is compounding the depression or vice versa.” Several subsequent entries in her diary refer to renewed problems with flooding and tension. However, two months later, she wrote, “Although the night sweats are back, I’m happy with my decision not to continue with HRT. I’m not comfortable putting that in my body. I’m going to find me a naturopath.”

Although still suffering discomfort, Georgie was happier to achieve control using what she termed a more natural approach. She actually visited a Chinese herbalist rather than a naturopath. To Georgie, the main advantage of herbal treatment was that it was intermittent therapy “aimed at bringing the body back into balance.” By “balance” she appeared to mean a sense of control and mind/body integration, allied with bodily well-being.

The other women on HRT also monitored their response, with their physical reaction being part of this

process. Those who remained happy with the therapy continued with it, seeing it as restoring a sense of balance and control. However, HRT regimens could be experienced as alienating. Just as menopausal symptoms had the potential to disrupt a woman's sense of self, so too did hormonal therapy. Della had not started HRT because of troublesome symptoms; rather, she had done it at her doctor's recommendation, after experiencing some mild symptoms. For this reason, she did not experience the therapy as entirely positive. She was concerned that in commencing HRT, she had handed control of her body over to the doctor. She did not view the therapy as a way to integrate mind and body; instead, she felt that HRT had caused her to lose contact with her body rhythms. Having experienced an ambivalent relationship with her body as a younger woman and having achieved a degree of ease at midlife, Della had become used to monitoring her body. In speaking of a recent experience of forgetting to take progesterone for a month and still having a period, she said: "The really interesting thought that I had was, 'If I'm on hormone replacement therapy, I don't know if I'm normal'." To Della, "normal" meant being able to monitor her body's changes without medication confusing the issue.

The women for whom significant menopausal symptoms resulted in a loss of control, including Georgie, saw regaining it as important to a sense of personal integrity and ability to function in their daily lives. HRT was seen, at least initially, as helpful, but on a long-term basis it was not necessarily seen as the answer for all women. Just as attempting to achieve bodily harmony or well-being influenced the decision to commence HRT, perceived lack of bodily harmony influenced the decision to give it up. Generally, when HRT was used to relieve symptoms, a decision to cease it did not occur for at least two years, suggesting that for a number of women, HRT was experienced as highly effective in the short term. Once a degree of equilibrium was achieved, body-reflexive praxis, in the form of monitoring and listening to the body, caused a number of women to rethink their decision and either cease HRT or choose alternative methods of managing their menopausal bodies. Managing a disruptive body, however, was only one of the challenges that midlife brought; the women also had to respond to processes associated with aging.

CHALLENGE OF AGING

The women in the study described responding to a change in their perception of self related to aging and the end of fertility. This was also true of a number of women with few or minimal symptoms of

menopause. Whether directly or obliquely, women made reference to aging and were influenced by discourses aligning youth and physical attractiveness with power. They experienced a sense of loss as well as vulnerability as they were confronted with aging. As midlife women, they had the dual task of overcoming social stereotypes while struggling with personal acceptance of physical changes. Along with the changes came the perception that loss of youthful appearance and loss of fertility were accompanied by loss of physical desirability. This was less of a problem for the four nuns; as Deidre commented, "At 50 you're still considered young in the congregation." The women, particularly those in their fifties, also worried about declining stamina and potential illness. There was, however, considerable variety in the ways they reported their feelings.

While all the women viewed aging with ambivalence, their situation and prior experiences tended to shape their responses. Visual signs of aging had often been first noted when the women were in their early forties. Whereas previously partnered women related signs of aging to loss of physical desirability, as well as to the public presentation of self, those who had never married, including the nuns, tended to see them solely in relation to the presentation of self and their personal sense of attractiveness, or to body changes causing concern. Deidre wrote the following in her diary:

Aging. I look at my face in the mirror and I see scaly patches—skin cancer, could be? I see marked brown circles, blotches—wasn't like this once. I look at my hands—brown spots, skin cancer, one could be. I look at my nails, all lined and misshapen. . . . I look at my hair—what is this receding hairline? How can I make it come over my forehead to cover the spots? I can't, I've always combed it back. . . . I look at my arms—they are more hairy now, and my right ear itches with thrush, or old age!! Woe is me.

A discourse that emphasizes a youthful, attractive appearance as reflecting a competent image appeared to influence the way some women approached aging. Often, humor was used to balance the sense of loss, with remarks such as, "It's just as well that I'm not still teaching, or I'd frighten the children." However, Deidre, along with other women in their fifties, was equally or more concerned with a loss of fitness and stamina. She wrote in her diary of a number of worrisome symptoms: "Recently a couple of dizzy turns made me realize I was not an ageless machine. Had to go carefully, move gently as I changed positions—sitting to standing—bending over to upright—felt as though I would fall. A bit frightening."

While realizing she needed to slow down, Deidre

was caught in the bind of both her own and others' expectations of her. Again, presenting a competent image was uppermost in her mind. Frequent references were made in her diary to tiredness and the need for more sleep. As she aged, she increasingly questioned the assumption that the mind was able to exert control over the body.

For other women, menopause and the end of fertility were particular signs of aging. For some women, the sense of sexual identity, regardless of whether or not they had been in a sexual relationship or had children, was associated with continuing signs of fertility. For others, the end of fertility meant revisiting a sense of loss at not having had children. As a lifetime celibate, Georgie maintained that remaining childless was a choice she had made, and one that "went with the territory." Nonetheless, she had grappled with it at various times in her life. She said she was unprepared, with the onset of menopause at age 50, for a renewed sense of loss at being childless. She described the feeling as "an ache here" (pointing to her abdomen), adding: "When I turned 50, I felt as though my life was really going on the downhill plane, and being religious . . . and a celibate woman, I knew for certain that my chances of ever marrying or having a child were really over . . . I kind of knew that was it when I was about 40, but it's definitely it at 50."

In contrast, Della and Deidre had no regrets and experienced no renewed sense of coming to terms with childlessness in midlife. Alice also claimed that she had never regretted not having children. She had viewed as an unnecessary imposition the counseling her gynecologist recommended prior to the hysterectomy she underwent in her early forties. After the operation, however, while staying with a girlfriend, Alice was overwhelmed by a short but devastating period of grief:

I was resting one afternoon, and all of a sudden the floodgates opened, and I cried and sobbed . . . my girlfriend came home from work and said, "My God, what is wrong?" and I said, "I can't have a baby," and she said, "You never wanted to have a baby," and I said, "I know, but now I CAN'T!!!" . . . It was a whole awareness of what had happened to my body, and it was a real shock to me.

Alice said she realized she had probably suppressed or redirected any maternal instinct. This experience allowed her to grieve, albeit briefly, and get on with life.

Other women, including Deidre, rather than being unhappy about menopause as signaling the end of fertility, greeted the end of menstruation positively. Deidre's negative experience of periods and premenstrual tension left her with no regrets at their passing:

Six months since my last period. Just delighted! I looked in my menopause book, and it said you must wait 12 months before you can declare it's over. Then I will celebrate! I look back on the pain, feeling tired and terribly cranky before each period . . . When planning big events, I would hope it wouldn't be period time.

Several months later, in November, she refers again to her relief at coming to the end of menopause: "Looking back on 1992, it was the year my periods ended, and without a hot flash! Feel really happy when I can skip past the tampons in the supermarket." Deidre, then, had a mixed response to midlife and aging. While regretting the physical signs of aging, she welcomed the end of menstruation.

A number of other women had a generally positive attitude to their midlife bodies, indicating a sense of control and of feeling at ease with them. None of these women had had significant menopausal symptoms. Alice viewed having had a hysterectomy after age 40 as beneficial. Her experience of painful periods and undiagnosed endometriosis had enabled her, after experiencing a transient sense of loss, to see the operation as very positive for her health: "Suddenly I could feel at ease with my body because it wasn't doing all those unpredictable things any more." Of all the women, Alice seemed the one most in harmony with her body, referring to any change in any part of it as influencing her overall health. As she phrased it, "If something is wrong with my big toe, it influences my whole body. It doesn't remain in isolation." Alice also referred to the need for "a body being able to flow" and to being assisted in achieving a harmonious relationship with her body through personal exploration and through participation in, and facilitation of, feminist workshops.

ADJUSTING TO CHANGE

For those women who had menopausal symptoms or were coping with the negative aspects of body disruption and aging, achieving a more comfortable relationship with their bodies or accepting age-related physical changes appeared to be goals they needed to set. Their diaries demonstrated good days and bad days and reflected a process of both monitoring and integrating a changing body. The decline of menopausal symptoms, along with time, appeared to assist in this process. One woman wrote the following in her diary, six months after an entry bemoaning bodily changes:

There has been a cool change. I am beginning to feel more like myself. . . . At the same time, I am discovering more bits that are going astray. I have a rash of warts behind my right knee. This has led me to muse about

parts of one's anatomy that cannot readily be seen. I'd like to insert an india-rubber neck extension into myself. . . . Imagine the careful inspection that could be done. . . . The back could be examined at my leisure for bumps and skin irregularities.

As menopausal symptoms decrease, a balanced perspective reasserts itself. Deidre's later diary entries showed that she had come to terms with bodily changes and achieved a sense of equilibrium: "Feeling good is important to me. The last couple of months' entries in this diary indicate that I'm usually happy, and lately I've noticed I'm not so tired. My skin is still terrible. Scaly patches getting worse. Not a pretty sight, but luckily self-image seems more secure these days."

At the same time, the precariousness of embodied identity was captured by Georgie. Having come to terms with putting on weight and with the onset of menopause in her late forties, she said, "If this is the middle-aged spread, I can cope with it." Several years later, she was continuing to put on weight, and wrote, "Recently I came across a 'thought for the day' on a calendar. It was a quote from Doris Day and said 'The worst thing about midlife is you grow out of it,' and I thought, 'Oh my gawd, it's only just beginning.'"

ACCEPTANCE ESSENTIAL

Clearly, responses to a changing midlife body vary, depending on age and life circumstances. Responding to a changing body was made easier in the absence of menopausal symptoms or as menopausal symptoms subsided, and the response varied according to how the body and aging were experienced and perceived. To varying degrees, the majority of the women in the study spoke of their need to adjust to their changing bodies and the loss of power this represented. Acknowledging the end of fertility, the loss of physical attractiveness, aging, and the associated loss of power was part of the process. Several women discussed the need to accept the midlife body in order to "move on." Acceptance was not without sadness, but it was seen by most as essential to constructing a midlife identity.

The women's accounts of their bodies were seen as part of a construction of self. Regardless of the degree of bodily ease the women had achieved at midlife, menopause and menopausal symptoms—

particularly if distressing—caused a shift in their relationships with their bodies. The need to control the body in order to integrate mind and body, as well as to meet the demands of work, was seen as paramount, and HRT was often chosen as an initial means of achieving this goal. The women generally viewed such control as positive, giving them power over an unpredictable body and helping them experience a degree of harmony. Bodily reactions were heavily implicated in decisions to commence, continue, or stop therapy.

The need to adjust to a changing body was mentioned by the majority of women in the study, including the nuns, regardless of whether or not they had experienced menopause as distressing. For some of the women, a midlife body was viewed in a positive light; for others, its noticeable changes were a source of distress. Either way, the body was a major focus. Besides reflecting on past experience, the women sought, in midlife, to integrate a changing body into their sense of self. All the women, whether reflecting on past bodily experiences or managing current ones, appeared to be engaged in what Giddens has termed "the reflexive project of self," whereby self-identity is constituted by the reflexive ordering of life narratives. As they told their stories, their bodies remained a constant point of reference.

RECOMMENDED READING

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Carmel Seibold, R.N., Ph.D., is a nurse sociologist and a senior lecturer at the Australian Catholic University in Victoria, Australia.

The American College at Louvain

Reverend Kevin A. Codd

How else can I say it: Louvain fits like a fine old shoe. I am back in this centuries-old center of learning after a twenty-year absence, and the place just feels right to me. Much has changed since I last lived here as a seminarian, back in the late seventies. I'm older, of course, and the town has been considerably spruced up to attract the tourist trade. But as in all "right places," what was most true about it in my time, and in the time of so many before me over the past centuries, has graciously endured.

My first memories of Louvain were colored by the fact that I was very young, had never before been far from home, and was scared stiff to find myself in a place that I could not have imagined even a day before I arrived. The highway signs were blue instead of green; the buildings were compact, one almost on top of another; nearly everything seemed to be made of red brick; and the language on the street was uninterpretable by my untrained ear. Needless to say, it did not take long before I became fully immersed in my studies of theology at the Catholic University of Louvain, found friends in my new seminary (the American College), and even learned to say "please" and "thank you" in Flemish. Things that at first seemed so very strange became as familiar as my own shoes: the accents of our professors as they lectured in English, the never-ending cooing of the doves that resided in the trees in our seminary garden, and even the rain, drizzle, and North Sea mists that soaked us in during the winter.

Most important to me, as I look back on those years, was that I learned theology within a tradition that extended back to extraordinary intellects like

Erasmus and Justus Lipsius, and up through the professors of my own time: Jan Walgrave, Piet Fransen, Jan Lambrecht, and Christianne Brusselmans, to name just a few. As their predecessors had done for countless students of the "divine sciences" before me, those professors and so many others offered to us a rigorous method of study that emphasized the importance of the human intellect in making intelligible the divine. It taught us to keep an alert eye out for those kernels of clear truth that were at the heart of the various intellectual movements that had swept through Western civilization in the previous centuries, even as we kept a wary eye out for the failures in logic, the inconsistencies, and the blind spots in those movements. Our professors analyzed the intellectual innovations of the past centuries, in whatever fields might impact theology, so that what was faddish might be dismissed and what was precious might be put to good theological use. We learned to do the same by listening to them, studying under them, and being examined by them.

A DISTINGUISHED HISTORY

The theological acumen that I experienced in those years was nothing new in Louvain. It had been the bread and butter of the place long before I ever arrived on the scene. This university was at the forefront of responding to the challenge of the Reformation in Catholic Europe, while at the same time seeking to maintain the values promoted by the great humanist Erasmus. In later centuries it spearheaded much of the renewed interest in neoscholasticism.

And in our own century Louvain became the leading center of historical-critical study in the theological sciences—a methodology that still often carries the moniker “the Louvain Method.” Much of the initial enthusiasm for renewal of the Roman liturgy in the early half of the twentieth century was nurtured by the Benedictines at Louvain’s Mont Cesar Abbey. The phenomenological philosophy of Husserl that so influenced a young Karol Wojtyla was brought into dialogue with theology in this small Belgian town. And through the influence of Cardinal Suenens, Louvain scholars made significant contributions to the initiatives of the Second Vatican Council.

All this came from a university that in the nineteenth century was closed by Napoleon, and in the twentieth century experienced foreign occupation and total destruction of its library and much of its surrounding city—not once, but twice, in the First and Second World Wars. Louvain always rebuilt itself and quickly restored its reputation as one of the paramount academic centers in Europe. Sadly, what the warring forces of Europe could not do, the linguistic division that cut through Belgian society in the late 1960s at least partially accomplished: just as the Flemish- and French-speaking sectors of Belgian society partially divorced each other in those years, so the Catholic University of Louvain was rent into two autonomous institutions, each with its own language and campus. To their credit, each Catholic University of Louvain has since preserved, in its own way, the great tradition that both had nourished as one in the previous centuries.

An integral part of the Louvain story, at least as far as the church in North America is concerned, has been played by the American College seminary, located here for the past 147 years. In the early years after it first opened in an old butcher shop not far from the university’s main buildings, the college prepared young European seminarians to bring their faith and learning to the backwaters of a still-wild North American continent in the mid-1800s. Almost immediately, its mission grew as North American seminarians were sent here as early as 1857 to be formed in the European tradition before they returned to their home dioceses in Canada and the United States.

EDUCATION FOR EXCELLENT PASTORS

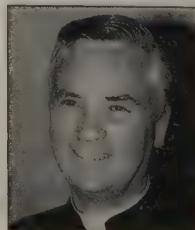
Across the ensuing decades, hundreds of North America’s finest professors of philosophy, theology, and canon law received their spiritual and intellectual formation here—a formation that they gladly passed on to their own students over the course of their ministerial lives. As important a contribution to the church in North America as their professorial lives

has been, it must also be said that an even prouder gift to North America that Louvain has given through the American College has been the hundreds of seminarians who came to Louvain without any intention of pursuing higher degrees. They came to Louvain not to become doctors of anything, but simply to become the best-educated priests they could become. Their bishops back in the United States and Canada understood that a critical element of good pastoring is good theology. They understood that priests who knew how to study, analyze, and teach would be a treasure for their local churches. And where better to train such priests than in Louvain? Hundreds of us who spent four to six years of our young lives absorbing the theology, wisdom, and intellectual humility of some of the world’s best Catholic professors returned home not to teach in universities or even in seminaries but to bring well-trained minds and sensitive hearts to our parish pulpits, confessionals, and counseling rooms. We were broadened, deepened, and wisened here, and most of us know that it was Louvain that made us good pastors.

MISSION IS EXPANDING

The Catholic University of Louvain recently celebrated 575 years of intellectual and spiritual excellence. This milestone in its history is being observed with the awareness that the mission of this university’s ecclesial faculties currently extends not only to the churches of Western Europe and North America but also to great numbers of lay and religious students from Asia, Africa, and Latin America who today populate its aulas.

So here I am in my small office in the American College on a cool evening, listening once again to the doves of Louvain coo in the trees just outside my window. It amazes me that I am here again and that once more I walk these cobbled streets, where precious medieval buildings mix with the most modern. I feel so privileged to be able once again, through the seminarians with whom I work, to breathe the unique intellectual air of this remarkable center of Catholic learning. The tradition continues, thanks be to God. I feel so much at home here. With over twenty years of pastoring under my belt, the theology of Louvain makes more sense to me than ever.



Reverend Kevin A. Codd, a priest of the Diocese of Spokane, Washington, is the newly appointed rector of the American College, the U.S. bishops’ seminary in Louvain, Belgium.

An Integrative Model of Pastoral Counseling and Spiritual Direction

Len Sperry, M.D., Ph.D.

In the article "Approaches to Transformation" (HUMAN DEVELOPMENT, Spring 2001), I called for a re-visioning of the theory and practice of pastoral counseling and spiritual direction. My contention was that new models for the practice of pastoral counseling must begin with human experience, be less reductionistic, and rely less on psychological constructs that promote self-transformation, individualism, and spiritual narcissism. The fact that psychological theories—particularly theories of the self—have been increasingly criticized for being reductionistic and for promoting individualism and narcissism is both ironic and embarrassing, given that a main reason individuals seek out spiritual and pastoral guidance is to neutralize and reverse the cultural pulls of individualism and narcissism. Finally, I proposed that future theories need to be more holistic and integrative. This article describes and illustrates an integrative model that begins with human experience, is comprehensive and holistic, and balances social transformation with self-transformation.

AN INTEGRATIVE MODEL

The model proposed here involves the spiritual and psychological, and it correlates moral domains of human experience as well as the dimensions of transformation. Six dimensions of transformation (religious/spiritual, somatic, affective, moral, sociopolit-

ical, and intellectual), along with taxonomies of the spiritual domain (specifically spiritual practices), the psychological domain (specifically self-capacities), and the moral domain (particularly virtues), have been combined to form a conceptual map of the spiritual journey. This map has considerable promise for assessing, selecting goals and a focus, planning interventions, and monitoring progress throughout the course of spiritual direction and pastoral counseling. Furthermore, the proposed model provides a holistic and comprehensive perspective for understanding and respecting an individual's unique spiritual journey—including not only that person's experiences and strivings to grow and to develop his or her gifts and talents, but also any moral, spiritual, and psychological baggage.

The proposed integrative model correlates and specifies relationships among the following four taxonomies: transformation, virtues, spiritual practices, and self-capacities.

TRANSFORMATION

Across the major religious and spiritual traditions, transformation is considered the endpoint, or outcome, of the spiritual journey. It is a considerably broader construct than self-transcendence. In the Christian tradition, transformation includes both self-transformation, or conversion, and social transfor-

mation of the community and world under the reign of God. Transformation is a process of change into mature relationship with God that has repercussions for human relationships and human actions. As such, it involves grace. According to Keith Egan, transformation involves developing mature human friendships and developing a friendship with God.

The taxonomy selected for transformation, adapted from the works of Bernard Lonergan and Don Gelpi, reflects transformation of both self and community. This taxonomy involves the six dimensions of transformation: somatic, affective, religious/spiritual, moral, intellectual, and sociopolitical. It is noteworthy that Howard Clinebell, author of *Basic Types of Pastoral Care and Counseling*, describes six nearly identical dimensions in his highly regarded "revised model" of pastoral counseling and, by extension, spiritual direction.

As presented in this article, the taxonomy of the dimensions of transformation articulates the transformative domain and encompasses the outcomes, or "markers," of the three other taxonomies, which articulate the moral, spiritual, and psychological domains. Clinically, such markers are most useful in assessing a client's overall level of life functioning, particularly in the context of spiritual direction and pastoral counseling. Brief descriptions of the dimensions of transformation follow:

Somatic refers to body structure, bodily sensations, and memories. It is primarily about achieving and maintaining a relatively high degree of wellness, even despite a disability, disease, or terminal illness.

Affective involves taking responsibility for one's emotional well-being. It requires the forgiveness of past hurts and the replacement of anger, fear, and guilt with love, compassion, sensitivity, and enthusiasm.

Religious/spiritual challenges the individual to live for the one true God instead of idols such as reputation, wealth, and power. The goal is a commitment to unconditionally seeking God's will and vision of the Kingdom of God.

Moral challenges the person to move from simple gratification of immediate personal needs to living by consistent principles of ethics and justice. It involves the capacity to deal with moral dilemmas and challenges faced in everyday life, and an increasing capacity to criticize false value systems that corrupt Christian conscience.

Intellectual involves the pursuit of the truth amid ideologies and personal prejudices that rationalize

sinful conduct. Beyond a knowledge of religious beliefs and tenets, it requires a sufficiently critical grasp of theological issues and controversies surrounding one's faith tradition to enable one to respond to them.

Sociopolitical involves moving beyond self-transformation to bring about the reign of God in one's community and the world. It requires a commitment to challenging corporations, and institutions, as well as vested-interest groups that promote other value systems.

VIRTUES

While the moral domain is quite broad, moral theology has traditionally emphasized character, which provides orientation and direction in life. The time-honored maxim "Plant an act, reap a habit; plant a habit, reap a virtue; plant a virtue, reap a character; plant a character, reap a destiny" makes this point and indicates the requisites of character. Because character emerges from the constellation of an individual's virtues and vices, virtue was selected as the basis for developing a taxonomy of the moral domain that would be germane to the practice of spiritual direction and pastoral counseling. Unlike psychological constructs such as personality and self, which focus primarily on the individual, character is a construct that focuses on the individual's relationship with and responsibility to the community. Thus, character and virtue are principally social rather than personal constructs. The taxonomy is based on acquired virtues rather than infused virtues and was derived from the "taxonomies" of James Keenan and Bernard Haring. Selection was based on the extent of correlation with the six dimensions of transformation. The following virtues are ordered in this taxonomy: temperance, physical fitness, compassion, self-care, charity, holiness, trustworthiness, fidelity, prudence, justice, and fortitude/courage.

Temperance moderates the attraction of food, drink, and other sensual pleasures and balances one's desire to achieve good.

Physical Fitness involves taking responsibility for one's own physical health and well-being.

Compassion enables one to act with caring and concern and to respond with empathy (i.e., to understand and respond to the other's frame of reference).

Self-care ensures taking responsibility for one's own psychological health and well-being, making it the virtue of self-love.

Charity is a freely given gift of God that unites us to God and enables us to curb our self-centeredness and reach out to others.

Holiness enables one to mediate the presence of God in one's environment.

Trustworthiness enables one to relate to others with honesty, fairness, truthfulness, loyalty, dependability, and humility.

Fidelity ensures treating those to whom one is closely related (e.g., friends, spouse, children, community members) with special care and concern.

Prudence disposes an individual to discern true good in circumstances and to choose the right means of achieving it.

Justice ensures treating others equally and fairly, as well as recognizing unfairness and inequality in the world around us.

Fortitude/courage ensures firmness in difficulties (e.g., facing fears and trials, sacrificing for a just cause) and constancy in the pursuit of the good.

SPIRITUAL PRACTICES

While the spiritual domain of life is very broad, the actual practice of spiritual disciplines or techniques is one of its most personal and tangible aspects. The challenge was to find or develop a taxonomy of spiritual practices. Roger Walsh, in *Essential Spirituality: The Seven Central Practices to Awaken Heart and Mind*, has described seven classes of spiritual practices, which he derived from the major spiritual and religious traditions. They correlate highly with the six dimensions of transformation and appear to be germane to the practice of spiritual direction and pastoral counseling. The following six-category taxonomy also correlates with the virtues taxonomy. These spiritual practices include:

Transforming cravings and redirecting desires through fasting; single-pointed attention; custody of the senses; exercise regimen; commitment to simple living.

Healing the heart and learning to love through forgiveness; reconciliation; inner healing work; reframing fear, hurt, and anger.

Awakening spiritual vision through centering prayer; meditation; mantra; community worship; mindfulness in eating, in walking, in listening, in speech.

Living ethically by practicing right actions; giving up gossip; practicing truthfulness; confessing and making amends.

Developing wisdom and spiritual understanding through spiritual reading; committing time to silence and solitude; practice in recognizing the sacred in all things.

Expressing spirit in service through almsgiving; tithing; voting regularly; involvement in volunteer activities; advocating justice (e.g., for the poor).

SELF-CAPACITIES

The psychological domain, especially when viewed from a spiritual perspective, has traditionally emphasized self theory. This emphasis has been the source of considerable criticism and concern. Nevertheless, the construct of self is intimately related to the construct of character, and both can be conceptualized as representing two side of a coin. The most tangible aspect of self is self-capacity. Self-capacities are defined as requisite abilities that are essential for adequate personal functioning and adequate functioning in relationships and in the community. James Masterson, M.D., has described, in *The Personality Disorders: A New Look at the Developmental Self and Object Relations Approach*, ten such capacities, derived from research in the areas of object relations and self-psychology. These were supplemented with three additional self-capacities in order to establish a taxonomy that correlated with the dimensions of transformation and the taxonomies or virtues and spiritual practices. These capacities are defined as follows:

Self-activation: the capacity to identify one's unique individuality, goals, and wishes and then to be assertive in expressing and achieving them.

Self-mastery: the capacity to achieve a balance of pleasure and self-control over needs, desires, wishes, and cravings.

Self-acknowledgment: the capacity to renew belief in one's own worthwhileness and to acknowledge that one has effectively coped with a crisis or concern.

Spontaneity: the capacity to experience a wide range of feelings appropriately, deeply, and without blocking or deadening their impact.

Self-soothing: the capacity to limit, minimize, and soothe painful affects without recourse to emotional numbing, depersonalization, or derealization.

Intimacy: the capacity to express the self fully in a close relationship with minimal anxiety or fear of rejection.

Self-continuity: the capacity to recognize and to acknowledge that the inner self persists and is continuous through space and over time.

Creativity: the capacity to use the self to replace old, familiar patterns with new, unique, and different patterns.

Autonomy: the capacity to regulate self-esteem and to be alone with minimal fear of abandonment or engulfment.

Self-surrender: the capacity to forgo self-interests that are obstacles to being caring and compassionate.

Commitment: the capacity to commit the self to a personal, community, or career goal or to a relationship and then to persevere in attaining or maintaining it.

Critical reflection: the capacity to objectively analyze ideas, ideologies, and situations and the related underlying assumptions.

Social consciousness: the capacity to analyze social situations in terms of ethical and moral assumptions and consequences.

INTEGRATIVE MODEL

The table that follows illustrates the relationship of the moral, spiritual, psychological, and transformative dimensions.

Space limitations preclude a fuller description and articulation of these taxonomies and the relationships among them. Future articles will provide more detail. A brief discussion of how this integrative model could be utilized in spiritual direction and pastoral counseling follows, and the process is illustrated by revisiting the case study of Mary Louise Enders, originally discussed in "Approaches to Transformation" (HUMAN DEVELOPMENT, Spring 2001).

UTILIZING THE INTEGRATIVE MODEL

The following practice guidelines provide pastoral counselors and spiritual directors with strategies for facilitating process and outcomes. Eight steps or strategies are involved in this simple protocol:

- Establish a relationship of mutuality with the client. Through the use of active listening, respect, and unconditional positive regard, engage the client in the counseling or direction process. Elicit the client's concerns about and expectations of spiritual direction or pastoral counseling, and determine his or her commitment to the process.
- Begin an assessment of the dimensions of transformation, enlisting the involvement of the client. Involving the client in the assessment of the six dimensions orients him or her to transformation—both self-transformation and social transformation—as the goal of spiritual direction and pastoral counseling. With the client, estimate his or her level of functioning in each dimension.
- Assess the level of development of the self-capacities for each dimension of transformation (i.e., the presence or absence of developmental lags or deficits). This assessment is usually performed by the counselor or director because of the technical nature of this complex psychological construct.
- Assess the presence and absence of virtues and spiritual practices, especially for the dimensions of transformation in which the client has low levels of functioning.
- On the basis of this assessment of the dimensions of transformation, self-capacities, virtues, and spiritual practices, construct a matrix. The matrix lists the low-functioning dimensions of transformation and the corresponding self-capacities, virtues, and self-practices, which will become the focus of the counseling or spiritual direction.
- In collaboration with the client, establish a plan that includes a focus and targeted goals: (a) establish the primary focus, prioritize goals, and consider referral for targeted goals beyond one's competence and scope of practice; (b) specify targeted virtues to be cultivated and practiced; (c) specify targeted activities and techniques for a given class of spiritual practices (e.g., centering prayer, focused spiritual reading).
- Implement the plan, utilizing interventions targeted to the focus and goals. The plan may include prescribed spiritual reading or prayer methods; therapeutic interventions, such as cognitive disputation or interpretation; exercises or homework; and even referral for psychotherapy or medication evaluation.
- Assess and monitor progress or change, utilizing targeted markers of progress (e.g., the number of days per week and time per day spent in centering prayer, or the reduction or absence of insomnia and anxiety symptoms when alone or feeling conflicted). Again, collaborating with the client about choosing markers and monitoring progress encourages client commitment and involvement.

Moral Domain	Spiritual Domain	Psychological Domain	Transformative Domain
<i>Virtues</i>	<i>Spiritual Practices</i>	<i>Self-Capacities</i>	<i>Dimensions of Transformation</i>
temperance, physical fitness	transforming cravings	self-activation, self-mastery	somatic
compassion, self-care	healing the heart, learning to love	self-acknowledgment, spontaneity, self-soothing, intimacy, self-continuity, creativity, autonomy	affective
charity, holiness	awakening spiritual vision	(autonomy) self-surrender	religious/spiritual
trustworthiness, fidelity	living ethically	commitment (intimacy)	moral
prudence	developing wisdom and understanding	critical reflection	intellectual
justice, fortitude/courage	expressing spirit in service	social consciousness	sociopolitical

For instance, a pastoral counselor would assess all dimensions of transformation. Let's assume, for the purpose of illustration, that the only lag noted is in the affective dimension. The counselor would assess for the presence or absence of requisite self-capacities (e.g., low in autonomy), the extent to which the clients has mastered requisite spiritual practices in each dimension (e.g., deficit in healing the heart), and the extent of requisite virtues (e.g., low in self-care). Counseling could, whether initially or some time later, focus on increasing autonomy, emotional healing, and the acquisition of the virtue of self-care. Intervention strategies—including the prospect of referral for areas outside the counselor's area of competence, as well as tactics and time frames—could then be discussed and planned with the client. In this example, strategies might include focusing on forgiveness regarding certain circumstances or relationships, following specific spiritual practices to facilitate healing of the heart and cultivate the virtue of self-care, and perhaps pursuing a formal therapeutic focus on an emotion (e.g., anger).

CASE STUDY REVISITED

In the earlier article "Approaches to Transformation," I suggested that the psychospiritual formulation and the plan for the course of spiritual dimension are not sufficiently responsive to Mary Louise Enders's actual needs. The plan seems unrealistic,

given her previous pattern of pleasing others and being self-effacing. In fact, following the plan to act more assertively with her pastor might actually lead to her getting fired. Utilizing the integrative model would result in a more holistic formulation—a psychospirituomoral formulation—and a more specific and concrete plan for the course of spiritual direction. In terms of the dimensions of transformation, Mary Louise appears to be functioning reasonably in the somatic, moral, and intellectual dimensions, whereas developmental delays or deficits are noted in the following dimensions:

Affective Dimension. There appear to be delays in the self-capacities of self-acknowledgment and autonomy. Self-acknowledgment is the capacity to cope with crises or concerns in a positive fashion without undue dependence, solicitousness, or pleasing others in order to maintain self-esteem and avoid rejection. Autonomy is the capacity to act independently and regulate self-esteem without fear of abandonment or engulfment. Focused psychotherapy has been shown to be helpful in developing these self-capacities. Further development of these capacities would subsequently facilitate the greater acquisition of the virtue of self-care, which is probably underdeveloped in this client.

Religious/Spiritual Dimension. Focusing on a meditation method, such as centering prayer or the Chris-

tian Meditation method as taught by Main, could be useful in deepening the client's prayer life; thus, it would be a recommendation in the plan.

Sociopolitical Dimension. Finally, there appears to be underdevelopment of the self-capacity of critical social consciousness—that is, the capacity to analyze social and organizational situations and dynamics in terms of ethical and moral assumptions and consequences. Consequently, development of the virtues of justice and courage seems to be delayed. Presumably, cultivation of these virtues would give Mary Louise the courage to confront and change the system that tacitly supports the pastor's apparently arbitrary and abusive actions without due process.

This plan, based on a psychospirituomoral formulation, indicates the value and utility of deepening the client's prayer life. It identifies delays in three self-capacities that are likely to limit the acquisition of the virtues of self-care, justice, and courage. It also suggests specific ways of facilitating the process of transformation in these three dimensions.

Spiritual directors and pastoral counselors who operate from the integrative model, and who have internalized the spirituality that it embodies, are unlikely to sit back and wait for clients like Mary Louise to initiate discussions of difficult and troubling concerns. By engaging clients in a mutual assessment of the dimensions of transformation, these spiritual directors and pastoral counselors will invariably bring such concerns to the surface or find appropriate ways to reintroduce them. If they were asked whether achieving the goal of increased transformation seems possible if Mary Louise silently avoids dealing with difficult situations, like the firing of personnel without due process, or sexually inappropriate behavior, their answer would inevitably be no.

MORE MODELS NEEDED

At this stage of its development, it is premature to expect that an adequate and viable foundational

theory for the professional practice of pastoral counseling and spiritual direction will emerge soon. It is more realistic to focus on the development of comprehensive and integrative taxonomies and models. To short-circuit this arduous and necessary stage of theory development seems futile and self-defeating.

The model described in this article is proposed not as the definitive foundational model but as an example of how model building in pastoral counseling and spiritual direction might proceed. This proposed model integrates and correlates three taxonomies: of virtues, of spiritual practices, and of self-capacities in relation to the dimensions of transformation. Of course, its conceptual and clinical viability remain to be seen. Meanwhile, my hope is that this initial revising effort will encourage the development of other taxonomies and foundational models.

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Len Sperry, M.D., Ph.D., is clinical professor of psychiatry at the Medical College of Wisconsin in Milwaukee. He currently teaches at Barry University in Miami Shores, Florida.

A Chapter's Discernment

Susan Rakoczy, I.H.M., Ph.D.

As I write this article, two icons are in front of me: Louis Florent Gillet, C.Ss.R., and Theresa Maxis Duchemin, I.H.M.—cofounders of our Immaculate Heart of Mary congregation. The iconographer, Nancy Lee Smith, I.H.M., has titled them “He Who Is Like Fire” and “Holder of the Fire.”

Our recent general chapter was a gathering characterized by desire to approach the fire of the Spirit, an immersion in that Spirit in processes of contemplative listening and communal discernment, and a rising in the transforming fire of the Spirit to go forth to live the directions and decisions of the chapter. Because the chapter was shaped in processes of communal discernment, this article reflects on the dynamic of the chapter in order to discover what this congregation's experience may contribute to ongoing theological reflection on discernment.

FOCUS OF THE CHAPTER

As noted in the *Chapter 2000 Directions* statement, the chapter was envisioned as “a renewal/an intensification of the deepest purposes and values at the heart of our IHM life and mission,” with the goal of “choosing our directions and leadership in light of these.”

The chapter stood in organic continuity with certain other significant experiences: Assembly '99,

which had reflected on IHM experience over the past six years, and conversations held by mission units (groups of about 12 to 20 vowed members and associates), which had prepared proposals and had begun to focus on directions. The primary intentionality of the ten-day experience (which had been prefaced by three days of organizational sessions in July 1999) was to seek the Spirit as a group, searching for the call of God in the midst of a global context of poverty, racism, intolerance, global capitalism, increased awareness of our interdependence with the entire earth community, hunger for spirituality, and the possibilities of information technology.

The intentionality of the chapter was focused on desire: what do we desire to be and do as a congregation? What are the desires of the Spirit of God for us? How can desire meet desire? How will we know that our desires are God's desires?

This chapter body itself was much larger: 110 sisters, rather than the usual 40 to 45, representing a cross-section of the congregation. In addition, a number of participant-observers joined in the discussions of the chapter of affairs. Other observers came to some other sessions.

In circles of six, meeting “knee to knee and heart to heart,” we focused the discernment experience on listening to each other's desires, hopes, fears, hesita-

tions, and experience of God. Because circles have no sides, the dynamic was one of openness, of being together in our diversity.

BASIS OF COMMUNAL DISCERNMENT

Communal discernment proceeds from a shared sense of common experience, vision, and charism. In her reflections on discernment, which were given to the delegates, Bette Moslander, C.S.J., one of the cofacilitators, described four dispositions of readiness for communal discernment:

- an earnest desire for the good of the community
- a readiness of heart to be present to the community in the exploration of God's desire for the community
- a willingness to admit one's vulnerability, weakness, error, sinfulness
- prayer for oneself and the community

What unites a body is the foundation for seeking the next step in its response to the Spirit of God. Throughout the chapter, specific elements of our IHM heritage were repeatedly invoked as we spoke of our deepest desires. Two phrases invoked the IHM sense of mission: "the liberating mission of Jesus" and "Affirmation 10," a statement from the 1972 general chapter, which had profoundly shaped IHM vision "toward the eradication of the causes and forms of injustice and oppression and toward the creation and promotion of structures which will correct inequities in society." The biblical basis of this vision and a key theme in IHM spirituality is the Luke 4:16-22 text on Jesus' proclamation of his vision of mission: to liberate, to heal, to proclaim God's shalom.

The congregation directions from the 1987 assembly were also invoked often, with their themes of solidarity with the poor; shaping a new world of peace, nonviolence, and reconciliation; and giving a special claim to the materially poor, especially in the city of Detroit, Michigan, an important place of IHM mission.

Theresa Maxis Duchemin was a strong and comforting presence who united the delegates as they prayed, conversed, and moved to consensus. Theresa, together with Louis Florent Gillet, C.Ss.R., had founded the IHM Sisters in 1845 in Monroe, Michigan. A founding member of the Oblates of Providence, the first religious congregation in the United States of African American women, Theresa joined Father Gillet in his project of founding a teaching congregation on the Michigan frontier when it seemed to her that the Oblates, under racist pressure in those pre-Civil War years, would not survive. Born out of wedlock to a Haitian mother and a British father, Theresa found that her racial heritage

became an important point of contention in the intricate ecclesiastical politics of that era, as the correspondence between the bishops of Detroit and Philadelphia who knew Theresa reveals. Theresa's real role as cofounder faded in history until the middle of the twentieth century. This chapter's joyful declaration that "we affirm and embrace Theresa Maxis Duchemin, a woman of color, as our cofounder with Louis Florent Gillet, C.Ss.R." not only set the historical record straight but indeed welcomed Theresa home in a profound way. These elements of shared history and vision formed a strong foundation for the processes of communal discernment.

THE CHAPTER OF AFFAIRS

Proposals from the congregation at large, meeting in small groups called mission units, had been synthesized into six areas for reflection:

- creating a culture consistent with our values
- focusing our mission and ministry efforts
- living IHM religious life with integrity, with a renewed sense of identity and belonging
- moving forward with the Monroe Campus Long Range Master Plan
- proclaiming Theresa Maxis as cofounder
- continued educational processes

An underlying desire for right relationship—with God, each other, Theresa Maxis Duchemin, the church, society, and all of creation—had begun to emerge from the proposals.

In considering these content areas, the challenge was to "name the desires underneath the proposals and the directions statements." Thus, the dynamic was focused on a listening stance in which we delegates "were able to put aside our 'agendas' and put before us the common good of the congregation."

The structure of the chapter of affairs was threefold: remembering, considering, choosing. In the first phase, the delegates and participant-observers were engaged in a communal contemplation of the six themes, listening for how these themes spoke of the deepest desires of the congregation.

Considering led the delegates to "focus their communal vision and free their communal energy to serve the IHM mission in the future." This phase involved beginning to discern the underlying call and direction of the Spirit to the congregation at this time. The act of choosing involved reflection on the drafts of the six directions by the writing committees in order to articulate what had been stirring in the collective heart for five days. The chapter chose this underlying direction:

We believe that everything before us brought us to this moment and we claim our future directions within the richness of our tradition. Impelled by the growing realization that we are interconnected with the whole web of life, and that the escalation of violence, increasing global poverty, and the exploitation of the earth threaten all of creation, we renew our passion to live the liberating mission of Jesus in the spirit of humility, simplicity and zeal. We choose to en flesh this call by working with others to build a culture of peace and right relationship among ourselves, with the Church and with the whole earth community.

CHAPTER OF ELECTIONS

The discernment experience of the chapter of affairs provided the foundation for the election of the leadership council of eight women. A day of retreat for delegates and the seventeen nominees preceded the election process. The "heart-to-heart" circles were the main locus of discernment, consensus building, and decision. The procedure for each election was the same: each delegate reflected and made a list of four or five members' names for a position; the lists were shared in the circles, and patterns of consensus were noted; names around which consensus was emerging were shared with the chapter body; and finally, when consensus appeared to be moving toward one or two names, a secret ballot was taken.

Each delegate voted according to her conscience. One of the facilitators had instructed the delegates that "God is quite disinterested in who is elected. God is interested in why each delegate will or will not vote for persons in the process." Since the composition of the circles changed regularly, this helped to "prevent a build-up of positions and 'campaigning.'" A delegate commented that more times of private prayer between "tests for consensus" and specific votes "would have set the stage for greater freedom of spirit."

During both parts of the chapter, the facilitators challenged the delegates to "keep identifying the blocks inside ourselves" to the call of the Spirit. However, since learning "how to distinguish between consolation and desolation cannot be learned in one week," the process of discernment is actually only as authentic as each one's free response to the Spirit.

SIGNS OF GOD'S SPIRIT

The signs of the Spirit coalesced around three types of experiences: reverent listening, risk and trust, and reconciliation.

The quality of listening in the circles and as a del-

egate body was "deep, reverent, [and] attentive" to the diversity of ideas and strongly held opinions. People were very respectful of others' views, and the conversations in the circles about individuals nominated for leadership were marked by gentleness and the desire to know those persons more fully in both their strengths and weaknesses. There was "a willingness to let go of opinions and positions in a desire to seek unity" and an "openness, trusting our own insights as an important part of the whole and offering that perspective in the small groups."

Second, the ability to risk and to trust marked the Spirit's presence. As the *Chapter 2000 Directions* statement notes, "During this contemplative process we risked being vulnerable with one another. We shared the pain of past hurts and misunderstandings." Delegates spoke of "caring and compassion," as well as "admission of hurt and a willingness to forgive." This was perhaps most evident in conversations regarding the very sensitive issues of IHM identity and belonging, when "we entrusted to one another the dreams and hopes, the griefs and anguish which accompany this issue in the community and within our own experiences this was difficult, even wrenching at times, yet also cleansing and healing." A renewed sense of belonging, of holding together the IHM charism, was experienced as "we grew the ring of trust among ourselves." During this experience of risk, trust and reverence for the other, a "palpable shift in our energies" began the process of healing and reconciliation.

Third, many delegates found the presence of the Spirit in the gifts of forgiveness and reconciliation. One of the seventeen "discernees" for leadership located the genesis of this gift in the January discernment retreat for the nominees, which set the stage for "a seeking for reconciliation and a willingness to let go of opinions and positions in a desire to seek unity."

Another delegate had anticipated that the expression of diversity "would make strong and hurtful divisions among us," but instead she found that "this chapter brought us to the moment of wanting to ask forgiveness from one another and thus do the work of reconciliation about issues that have divided us for thirty or more years."

Reconciliation and a renewed sense of unity are twin fruits of the chapter; for the delegates sensed and experienced a "river of life" that runs much deeper than differences. This is also a "river of peace," for many delegates commented on the depth and power of their experience of peace throughout the chapter, especially during the chapter of elections.

Thus, the chapter was marked by profound signs of the Spirit during the processes of discernment: reverence for each other, profound listening, vulnerability, risk, trust, forgiveness, and reconciliation, all

enfolded in an experience of the peace of Christ. The willingness of the chapter body to look to the whole rather than to parts, while certainly not perfect—the comments of some delegates about their experiences of political moments witness to this—also gives evidence of the gift of unity.

FRUITS OF DISCERNMENT

In evaluating a discernment experience, two types of fruits are looked for: the outcomes and decisions of the discernment and the specific fruits of the Spirit, as described in Galatians 5:22–23: “love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, trustfulness, gentleness and self-control.”

The specific directions of the chapter and the election of a new leadership council for 2000–06 are the concrete outcomes of the chapter and are “positive and life-giving decisions.” The dynamic of the chapter, contemplative listening, offers an invitation to the entire IHM congregation to go forward “through continued encounters of the heart.” Paradoxically, this is both imprecise and very specific. The contents of conversations of the heart regarding sensitive issues are not known until they happen, but the dynamic of the conversations is intended to be openness, trust, risk, forgiveness, and reconciliation. The sense of peace that marked the election process was confirmed by the positive response by the congregation as a whole in affirming our new leaders.

The specific fruits of the Spirit flowing from these discernment processes are described by the delegates as joy and peace as the “Spirit of God used an earnest community,” a sense of energy and renewed congregational vitality (which is yet to be lived, of course), “awash in gratitude, drenched in amazement, breathing in the fresh air of possibility and challenge.” In contrast to what happened at other chapters, “there [were] no deeply wounded people after the election.”

At the end of the chapter, the two facilitators shared their own assessment and interpretation of the signs of the Spirit in the discernment process. They spoke of a “pure fearlessness in facing your divisions and [holding] true to your deepest desires.” They characterized the chapter body as a group of “very docile” women of “profound obedience,” which recalls that obedience is linguistically linked to *audiere*—to listen, to be attentive to the call of the Spirit of God. They described the movement of the chapter as a coming “home to yourselves,” an experience in which “God has shown you what your true heart is and breathed God’s spirit in you. You could not have done what you have done without God working in you.”

INTERPRETATION AND EVALUATION

Evaluation and interpretation of discernment processes must examine the following: the common basis of discernment, the degree of freedom of those involved, the process itself (including its flaws and limitations), the first fruits, including the type of confirmation of the decision(s), and the fruits yet to be lived.

Common Basis. The chapter delegates were a diverse group in age and experience of IHM life, and this very diversity provided a good cross-section of the congregation as a whole. All had participated in the July 1999 organizational session and had access to the same background material for the chapter. Some had greater knowledge and background of some of the issues (e.g., sustainability) than others. The language of the chapter—references to call, charism, Affirmation 10, the liberating mission of Jesus—intensified the sense of common bonding in community, which is so essential to discernment.

Freedom. This is, of course, impossible to gauge fully because the dynamics of each person’s heart are known imperfectly. But various signs point to a degree of freedom that facilitated the seeking of the leading of the Spirit together. These were the sense of readiness and openness to listen to each other in the heart-to-heart circles, the depth of nonjudgmental listening and respect for each other, the sense of the good of the whole being more important than one’s own small part. However, this was not the experience of all, as evidenced from some delegate responses. Commenting on the election process, one delegate observed that “consistent prayer for freedom and a slower election process at the beginning would have set the stage for greater freedom of spirit.” There were some instances of “persuasive rhetoric” that may have limited the freedom of delegates to vote for a candidate in a discernment (not a political) mode.

The Process Itself. The role of the facilitators as “gentle channels” of the Spirit was commented on often. They regularly called the delegates to times of silent reflection in which they could be in touch with what they were feeling, thinking, and experiencing at that moment. More than once they said, “Sisters, do you really mean what you are asking for in that prayer?” They assisted the process by challenging us delegates “to keep identifying the blocks inside ourselves” and the work that this demanded.

Limitations of the Process. Several delegates commented on the dynamic in some circles during the election process, citing “an unwillingness to receive the choices made by others.” This meant that some groups did not report to the body as a whole that, for instance, five of their six members wished to bring a name forward. This limited the chapter body’s knowledge of the emerging consensus around specific persons.

In retrospect, since no process is perfect and since the heritage of other chapters with more obvious political groupings was operative at times, this dimension is to be lamented. But it does not invalidate the process as a whole, as the “spiritual effects of the election seem fine” and there was “on the part of most a spirit of joy and peace.”

First Fruits. These have already been described—joy, peace, forgiveness and reconciliation, a closer bonding in community, renewed energy and vitality for mission. There was a tangible sense of having participated in a corporate experience of great grace. These can all be interpreted as confirming signs of the Spirit. Experiences of peace and joy as the foundations of confirmation did not appear to have assumed the disguises of “false peace”: satisfaction that a task is completed, relief of tension, feeling good about oneself or ourselves, fruit of compromise. This takes into account that no discernment process is ever perfect, since as wounded yet en-Spirited persons, our experience of God is always incarnated in our real humanity. But as a body, the chapter appeared, in its acceptance of the directions and of the election of the leadership council, to evidence a peace that is more than the fruit of good group dynamics.

Long-term Fruits. At the closing of the chapter, IHM president Mary McCann told the delegates, “We cannot cling to this moment, but we can use it as a touchstone in the days ahead.” The *Chapter 2000 Directions* statement concludes with an invitation to the congregation “to commit with passion and energy to the spirit and substance” of the directions. While the specific fruits are yet to be seen concretely at this point, the hope is that the powerful presence of the Spirit will be a fire spreading from one to another, revitalizing and reenergizing the congregation as a whole.

THEOLOGICAL INTERPRETATION

What do these processes of discernment contribute to the development of the theology of discernment? Three factors are crucial: the context of discernment,

the interpretation of the presence of God, and the experiences of consolation and desolation.

The context of the chapter processes was not only the IHM congregation at the beginning of the new millennium but also the world in its complexity. Crucial to discernment is the discerners’ awareness that they are “persons in society” and that the choices they make are influenced by their culture, society, and world context. This was obvious in the chapter experience in many ways. The value of sustainability, concern for the “whole web of life,” awareness of the violence of the world (and the violence in each one’s heart), a feminist perspective, and the gap between the rich and the poor in the United States and on a global scale were repeatedly invoked as “signs of our times” to which close attention must be paid. The underlying direction that was accepted at the close of the chapter speaks of building “a culture of peace and right relationship” among IHMs, the church, and the “whole earth community.”

Thus, the discernment processes were clearly contextualized in reference to the problems of our world and church. Awareness of the concerns of peace, justice, and the integrity of creation were unmistakably present in the chapter discussions, confirming the processes as turned outward to the world.

How was the presence of God experienced? The basic foundation is faith, a radical trust in the divine presence. This was demonstrated in multiple ways: through the communal prayer and ritual, the sharing in the circles, the guidance of the facilitators to help each person search her heart for the presence of God, the witness to faith in the sharings in the larger chapter body. There was a felt consciousness that the body was corporately seeking the presence of God.

Another important dimension is desire. Great teachers of prayer, such as Catherine of Siena, Teresa of Avila, and Ignatius Loyola, all speak of the centrality of desire in our relationship with God. Teresa states that one must not “hold back one’s good desires.” In preparation for the chapter, the facilitators had instructed the delegates to reflect on the categories and themes for reflection, synthesized by the chapter of affairs committee in terms of desire: “How does this category reflect your deepest ideals and desires for yourself, your community and its mission?” The emphasis on desire was consistent throughout the chapter, and the evidence indicates that the delegates took this seriously and focused on each one’s desires, bringing them to prayer, reflection, and group sharing.

The signs of the Spirit of God—peace, joy, risk, trust, forgiveness, unity, and reconciliation—were also present, as described earlier. While the discern-

ment processes were not perfect, the overall experience, as evidenced by delegate responses, was of being led by the Spirit to a new place, where “together we move into and across uncharted waters, confident that the Spirit God hovers everywhere around us.”

The experience of consolation, as described in the Spiritual Exercises of Saint Ignatius of Loyola, was evident. Ignatius states, “I call consolation every increase of faith, hope and love, and all interior joy that invites and attracts to what is heavenly and to the salvation of one’s soul by filling it with peace and quiet in its Creator and Lord.” The increase of faith, hope, and love was evident in the confirming signs of the chapter. There was a sense that the chapter as a body had moved beyond its own expectations in the experience of strength, wholeness, and openness to the call of the Spirit. Where the group was on the first day was tangibly different from where it was at the closing, when there was a sense of going forward into the future together.

Ignatius also speaks of desolation as “darkness of soul, turmoil of spirit, inclination to what is low and earthly, restlessness rising from many disturbances and temptations which lead to want of faith, want of hope, want of love.” The comments from a few delegates about “persuasive rhetoric” and a “party spirit” being operative at times in the election process do not point to a pervasive experience of desolation; rather, they indicate that an agenda (however laudable) could interfere with and block the freedom of delegates to listen intently to the Spirit. Though there were difficult times during the chapter, there was never a time at which conversation broke down and the body found itself in a divided communal darkness.

As a discernment process, the chapter does give strong evidence of attention to the social and global contexts of discernment, of various dimensions of the presence of God, and of a corporate experience of consolation, though not without some signs of mild desolation.

Thus, as a contribution to the development of the theology of discernment, the chapter calls attention to the significance of context in its many layers as essential to discernment. The experience of faith, individual and communal, is heightened by the use of multiple ways to help the group center in God and focus its desires. The incompleteness of any discernment experience witnesses to the fact that God’s Spirit acts within the hearts and minds of limited persons—who, paradoxically, are also enkindled in that Spirit to move beyond the ordinary to seek and find the next step in their communal discipleship.

SYMBOLIC CANDLELIGHT

Fire is beautiful, entrancing, warming, useful—and also painful and potentially destructive. Louis Florent Gillet was filled with a “compelling fire that consumed [his] heart,” and Theresa Maxis Duchemin held the fire throughout the years of founding, trial, and exile. The fire of the Spirit, symbolized in the light of candles during the chapter, was sought and found in the discernment processes of those days. To share the grace of the chapter is to share this divine fire in the hope that the congregation, stirred and warmed by it, will continue to extend the liberating mission of Jesus Christ in familiar and new places and situations.



Sister Susan Rakoczy, I.H.M., Ph.D., lectures in systematic theology and spirituality at Saint Joseph’s Theological Institute in Cedara, South Africa.